

The Jesus Puzzle

Was There No Historical Jesus?

Earl Doherty

Historical Jesus or Jesus Myth: The Jesus Puzzle

Did Christianity begin with an historical Jesus or a Jesus myth? Was the original Jesus a man or a mythical savior god? Solving the Jesus Puzzle through the Christian and ancient-world record, from the Pauline epistles to the Gospels to the second century Christian apologists, from Philo to Josephus to Jewish and Hellenistic philosophy.

Christian faith evolved from a Jesus myth to an historical Jesus. New Testament scholarship needs to uncover that original evolution and rewrite the history of Western religion.

Quick Assembly

Putting the Jesus Puzzle Together in 12 Easy Pieces

Piece No. 1: A Conspiracy Of Silence

The Gospel story, with its figure of Jesus of Nazareth, cannot be found before the Gospels. In Christian writings earlier than Mark, including almost all of the New Testament epistles, as well as in many writings from the second century, the object of Christian faith is never spoken of as a human man who had recently lived, taught, performed miracles, suffered and died at the hands of human authorities, or rose from a tomb outside Jerusalem. There is no sign in the epistles of Mary or Joseph, Judas or John the Baptist, no birth story, teaching or appointment of apostles by Jesus, no mention of holy places or sites of Jesus' career, not even the hill of Calvary or the empty tomb. This silence is so pervasive and so perplexing that attempted explanations for it have proven inadequate. [See "Part One" of the Main Articles]

Piece No. 2: A Mute Record World Wide

The first clear non-Christian reference to Jesus as a human man in recent history is made by the Roman historian Tacitus around 115 CE, but he may simply be repeating newly-developed Christian belief in an historical Jesus in the Rome of his day. Several earlier Jewish and pagan writers are notably silent. The *Antiquities of the Jews* by the Jewish historian Josephus, published in the 90s, contains two famous references to Jesus, but these are inconclusive. The first passage, as it stands, is universally acknowledged to be a later Christian insertion, and attempts have failed to prove some form of authentic original; the second also shows signs of later Christian tampering. References to Jesus in the Jewish Talmud are garbled and come from traditions which were only recorded in the third century and later. [See "Postscript" in the Main Articles and Reader Feedback responses to Sean and Steven.]

Piece No. 3: Revealing The Secret Of Christ

Paul and other early writers speak of the divine Son of their faith entirely in terms of a spiritual, heavenly figure; they never identify this entity called "Christ Jesus" (literally, "Anointed Savior" or "Savior Messiah") as a man who had lived and died in recent history. Instead, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, God has revealed the existence of his Son and the role he has played in the divine plan for salvation. These early writers talk of long-hidden secrets being disclosed for the first time to apostles like Paul, with no mention of an historical Jesus who played any part in revealing himself, thus leaving no room for a human man at the beginning of the Christian movement. Paul makes it clear that his knowledge and message about the Christ is derived from scripture under God's inspiration. [See "Part Two" and Supplementary Articles Nos. 1 and 6.]

Piece No. 4: A Sacrifice In The Spiritual Realm

Paul does not locate the death and resurrection of Christ on earth or in history. According to him, the crucifixion took place in the spiritual world, in a supernatural dimension above the earth, at the hands of the demon spirits (which many scholars agree is the meaning of "rulers of this age" in 1 Corinthians 2:8). The Epistle to the Hebrews locates Christ's sacrifice in a heavenly sanctuary (ch. 8, 9). The Ascension of Isaiah, a composite Jewish-Christian work of the late first century, describes (9:13-15) Christ's crucifixion by Satan and his demons in the firmament (the heavenly sphere between earth and moon). Knowledge of these events was derived from visionary experiences and from scripture, which was seen as a 'window' onto the higher spiritual world of God and his workings. [See "Part Two" and Supplementary Articles Nos. 3 and 9.]

Piece No. 5: Salvation In A Layered Universe

The activities of gods in the spiritual realm were part of ancient views (Greek and Jewish) of a multi-layered universe, which extended from the base world of matter where humans lived, through several spheres of heaven populated by various divine beings, angels and demons, to the

highest level of pure spirit where the ultimate God dwelled. In Platonic philosophy (which influenced Jewish thought), the upper spiritual world was timeless and perfect, serving as a model for the imperfect and transient material world below; the former was the "genuine" reality, accessible to the intellect. Spiritual processes took place there, with their effects, including salvation, on humanity below. Certain "human characteristics" given to Christ (e.g., Romans 1:3) were aspects of his spirit world nature, higher counterparts to material world equivalents, and were often dependent on readings of scripture. [See "Part Two" and Supplementary Articles Nos. 3 and 8.]

Piece No. 6: A World Of Savior Deities

Christ's features and myths are in many ways similar to those of the Greco-Roman salvation cults of the time known as "mystery religions", each having its own savior god or goddess. Most of these (e.g., Dionysos, Mithras, Attis, Isis, Osiris) were part of myths in which the deity had overcome death in some way, or performed some act which conferred benefits and salvation on their devotees. Such activities were viewed as taking place in the upper spirit realm, not on earth or in history. Most of these cults had sacred meals (like Paul's Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23f) and envisioned mystical relationships between the believer and the god similar to what Paul speaks of with Christ. Early Christianity was a Jewish sectarian version of this widespread type of belief system, though with its own strong Jewish features and background. [See "Part Two" and responses to Miles and Anna.]

Piece No. 7: The Intermediary Son

The Christian "Son" is also an expression of the overriding religious concept of the Hellenistic age, that the ultimate God is transcendent and can have no direct contact with the world of matter. He must reveal himself and deal with humanity through an intermediary force, such as the "Logos" of Platonic (Greek) philosophy or the figure of "personified Wisdom" of Jewish thinking; the latter is found in documents like Proverbs, Baruch and the Wisdom of Solomon. This force was viewed as an emanation of God, his outward image, an agency which had helped create and sustain the universe and now served as a channel of knowledge and communion between God and the world. All these features are part of the language used by early Christian writers about their spiritual "Christ Jesus", a heavenly figure who was a Jewish sectarian version of these prevailing myths and thought patterns. [See "Part Two" and Supplementary Articles Nos. 4 and 5.]

Piece No. 8: A Single Story Of Jesus

All the Gospels derive their basic story of Jesus of Nazareth from a single source: whoever produced the first version of Mark. That Matthew and Luke are reworkings of Mark with extra, mostly teaching, material added is now an almost universal scholarly conclusion, while many also consider that John has drawn his framework for Jesus' ministry and death from a Synoptic source as well. We thus have a Christian movement spanning half the empire and a full century which nevertheless has managed to produce only one version of the events that are supposed to lie at its inception. Acts, as an historical witness to Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian movement, cannot be relied upon, since it is a tendentious creation of the second century, dependent on the Gospels and designed to create a picture of Christian origins traceable to a unified body of apostles in Jerusalem who were followers of an historical Jesus. Many scholars now admit that much of Acts is sheer fabrication. [See "Part Three", and response to Victor.]

Piece No. 9: The Gospels As (Fictional) "Midrash"

Not only do the Gospels contain basic and irreconcilable differences in their accounts of Jesus, they have been put together according to a traditional Jewish practice known as "midrash", which involved reworking and enlarging on scripture. This could entail the retelling of older biblical stories in new settings. Thus, Mark's Jesus of Nazareth was portrayed as a new Moses,

with features that paralleled the stories of Moses. Many details were fashioned out of specific passages in scripture. The Passion story itself is a pastiche of verses from the Psalms, Isaiah and other prophets, and as a whole it retells a common tale found throughout ancient Jewish writings, that of the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One. It is quite possible that Mark, at least, did not intend his Gospel to represent an historical figure or historical events, and designed it to provide liturgical readings for Christian services on the Jewish model. Liberal scholars now regard the Gospels as "faith documents" and not accurate historical accounts. [See "Part Three", the John Shelby Spong book review, and responses to Jan and Johnson.]

Piece No. 10: The Community Of "Q"

In Galilean circles distinct from those of the evangelists (who were probably all located in Syria), a Jewish movement of the mid-first century preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God put together over time a collection of sayings, ethical and prophetic, now known as Q. The Q community eventually invented for itself a human founder figure who was regarded as the originator of the sayings. In ways not yet fully understood, this figure fed into the creation of the Gospel Jesus, and the sayings document was used by Matthew and Luke to flesh out their reworking of Mark's Gospel. Some modern scholars believe they have located the "genuine" Jesus at the roots of Q, but Q's details and pattern of evolution suggest that no Jesus was present in its earlier phases, and those roots point to a Greek style of teaching known as Cynicism, one unlikely to belong to any individual, let alone a Jewish preacher of the Kingdom. [See "Part Three" and the Burton Mack book review.]

Piece No. 11: A Riotous Diversity

The documentary record reveals an early Christian landscape dotted with a bewildering variety of communities and sects, rituals and beliefs about a Christ/Jesus entity, most of which show little common ground and no central authority. Also missing is any idea of apostolic tradition tracing back to a human man and his circle of disciples. Scholars like to style this situation as a multiplicity of different responses to the historical Jesus, but such a phenomenon is not only incredible, it is nowhere attested to in the evidence itself. Instead, all this diversity reflects independent expressions of the wider religious trends of the day, based on expectation of God's Kingdom, and on belief in an intermediary divine force which provided knowledge of God and a path to salvation. Only with the Gospels, which began to appear probably toward the end of the first century, were many of these elements brought together to produce the composite figure of Jesus of Nazareth, set in a midrashic story about a life, ministry and death located in the time of Herod and Pontius Pilate. [See "Part Three" and the Burton Mack and Robert Funk book reviews.]

Piece No. 12: Jesus Becomes History

As the midrashic nature of the Gospels was lost sight of by later generations of gentile Christians, the second century saw the gradual adoption of the Gospel Jesus as an historical figure, motivated by political considerations in the struggle to establish orthodoxy and a central power amid the profusion of early Christian sects and beliefs. Only with Ignatius of Antioch, just after the start of the second century, do we see the first expression in Christian (non-Gospel) writings of a belief that Jesus had lived and died under Pilate, and only toward the middle of that century do we find any familiarity in the wider Christian world with written Gospels and their acceptance as historical accounts. Many Christian apologists, however, even in the latter part of the century, ignore the existence of a human founder in their picture and defense of the faith. By the year 200, a canon of authoritative documents had been formed, reinterpreted to apply to the Jesus of the Gospels, now regarded as a real historical man. Christianity entered a new future founded on a monumental misunderstanding of its own past. [See "The Second Century Apologists".]

All the essentials of the Jesus Puzzle in ONE easy-to-read article!
Written for the Journal of Higher Criticism, Fall 1997
The Jesus Puzzle: Pieces in a Puzzle of Christian Origins

The Jesus Puzzle

Was There No Historical Jesus?

by Earl Doherty

The following article appeared in the *Journal of Higher Criticism*, Fall 1997, published by the Institute for Higher Critical Studies based at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey (see Recommended Link at end of Home Page). It was written at the request of the editors, Darrell J. Doughty and Robert M. Price.

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The Jesus Puzzle Pieces in a Puzzle of Christian Origins

by Earl Doherty

Part One Pieces In The Puzzle

That Jesus was a man who lived and preached in Palestine during the early first century, who gave rise to a faith movement centered upon himself which would go on to become one of the world's great religions, might seem to be a fairly straightforward proposition. The idea lies at the base of nearly 2000 years of Christian belief and remains the starting point for almost all scholarly study of Christian origins. And yet, accommodating such a simple assumption to the documentary evidence is an exceedingly difficult task, a puzzle whose solution has proven stubbornly, perplexingly, maddeningly elusive.

If we could reduce the complexity of the evidence to a number of identifiable elements, including the wider setting of the times in which Christianity arose, we might come up with a list of ten puzzle pieces:

Piece No. 1: A Conspiracy of Silence

In the first half century of Christian correspondence, including letters attributed to Paul and other epistles under names like Peter, James and John, the Gospel story cannot be found. When these writers speak of their divine Christ, echoes of Jesus of Nazareth are virtually inaudible, including details of a life and ministry, the circumstances of his death, the attribution of any teachings to him. God himself is often identified as the source of Christian ethics. No one speaks of miracles performed by Jesus, his apocalyptic predictions, his views on any of the great issues of the time. The very fact that he preached in person is never mentioned, his appointment of apostles or his directive to carry the message to the nations of the world is never appealed to. No one looks back to Jesus' life and ministry as the genesis of the Christian movement, or as the pivot point of salvation history. The great characters of the Jesus story, Mary his mother, Joseph his father, John his herald, Judas his betrayer, Pilate his executioner: none of them receive a mention in all

the Christian correspondence of the first century. As for holy places, there are none to be found, for not a single epistle writer breathes a word about any of the sites of Jesus' career, not even Calvary where he died for the world's sins, or the empty tomb where he rose from the dead to guarantee a universal resurrection.

The one clear placement of Christ in recent times, the accusation in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 that Jews in Judea had killed the Lord Jesus, has been rejected as an interpolation by most of today's liberal scholars,¹ while the one Gospel episode Paul seems to allude to, Jesus' words over the bread and wine at what he calls "the Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:23f, can be interpreted as a mythical scene Paul has himself developed through perceived revelation (see Piece No. 5). Otherwise, no non-Gospel writer of the first century makes any statement which would link the divine spiritual Son and Christ they all worship and look to for salvation, with a man who had recently walked the sands of Palestine, taught and prophesied and performed miracles, a man executed by Pontius Pilate on Good Friday outside Jerusalem, to rise from a nearby tomb on Easter Sunday morning. This "conspiracy of silence" is as pervasive as it is astonishing. [See Part One: A Conspiracy of Silence in the Main Articles.]

The Gospel Jesus and his story is equally missing from the non-Christian record of the time. Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish historian Justus of Tiberias, Pliny the Elder as collector of reputed natural phenomena, early Roman satirists and philosophers: all are silent. Pliny the Younger, in his letter to Trajan from Bithynia c.112, does not speak of Christ in historical terms. Josephus' famous passage in *Antiquities* 18 is acknowledged to be, as it stands, a Christian interpolation, and arguments that an original reference to Jesus either stood there or can be distilled from the present one, founder on the universal silence about such a reference on the part of Christian commentators until the 4th century.² As for the reference in *Antiquities* 20 to James as "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ", this passage also bears the marks of Christian interference.³ The phrase originally used by Josephus may have been the same designation which Paul gives to James (Galatians 1:19), namely "brother of the Lord," which would have referred not to a sibling relationship with Jesus, but to James' position in the Jerusalem brotherhood, something which was probably widely known. A Christian copyist could later have altered the phrase (under the influence of Matthew 1:16) to render it more "historical" after Jesus of Nazareth was developed. [For a complete examination (and partial rethinking) of the Josephus question, see Supplementary Article No 10: Josephus Unbound: Reopening the Josephus Question.]

The Roman historian Tacitus (*Annals* 15:44), is the first pagan writer to speak of Jesus as a man crucified by Pilate. Rather than representing information he dug out of an archive (the Romans would hardly have kept a record of the countless crucifixions around the empire going back a century), this was probably derived from Christian hearsay about a human founder of the movement, newly circulating in the Rome of Tacitus' day (c.115). On the other hand, there are those who question the authenticity of this passage as well. Around the same time, Suetonius' report (*Claudius*, 25) about Jews in Rome agitating under "Chrestus" in the reign of Claudius is so brief and uncertain, it may not be about Christ and Christians at all. In any case, it would not witness to an historical Jesus.

As for the references to Jesus in the Jewish Talmud: even though some remarks are attributed to rabbis who flourished around the end of the first century (none earlier), they were not written down before the third century, and thus are unreliable. In any case, they are so cryptic and off the mark, they can scarcely be identified with the Gospel figure.

[For the non-Christian witness to Jesus, see Postscript in the Main Articles.]

Piece No. 2: A Transcendent Christ and a Missing Equation

When early writers like Paul speak of their "Christ Jesus", they do so in exclusively mythological terms. He is the divine Son in heaven, speaking through scripture, connected to the believer in mystical ways. Christ Jesus is the very substance of Godhead, pre-existent and the image of the Father. Through him God effected creation, and his sustaining power holds the universe together. Christ is also the cosmic redeemer who descended from heaven to undergo a sacrificial death (an earthly time and place is never stated) and was subsequently exalted and enthroned by God's side. Through this saving drama, Christ has subjugated the demon spirits of the air who harass humanity, he has brought the souls of the dead righteous out of Sheol, he has been given kingship over all supernatural and earthly powers, and he has reconciled an estranged universe to God. He has also been given divine titles formerly reserved for God.

Headly stuff. And all within two decades or less of the presumed man's life, a life which has apparently disappeared from the minds of those early believers in the cosmic Son, since they provide no mention of it, nor make any connection between the two. For all that Paul and others have to say about faith, no one ever raises the need to have faith that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and Messiah. The very equation: "The divine, spiritual Son = Jesus of Nazareth, recently on earth," is universally missing.

Even the death of Christ is presented in mythical terms. Passages like 1 Thessalonians 4:13 ("We believe Jesus died and rose again"), and the apparent designation of scripture as the source of Paul's doctrine that Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3), suggest that Christ's death was an article of faith, not a remembered historical event. The same is true, of course, for the resurrection. Paul never places Jesus' death in an historical setting (he never even tells us that Christ was *tried*), and in 1 Corinthians 2:8 he assigns responsibility for the crucifixion to the "rulers of this age" who unwittingly crucified "the Lord of glory" and thereby ensured their own destined destruction.

While the meaning of the phrase "rulers of this age" has been much debated, weight of opinion⁴ has come down on the side of the demon powers who were thought to inhabit the lower celestial spheres and were responsible for the evils of the world and its separation from God. This interpretation is supported by references to the demonic powers in relation to Christ's work in Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 3:10; and by chapter 9 of the Ascension of Isaiah, which describes the descent of the Son through the heavenly spheres and declares that he shall be hung upon a tree "by the god of that world," meaning Satan and his angels of the firmament. They, too, do not know who he is (9:13,15). [See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?]

2 Timothy 1:9 is another passage which alludes to an upper-world, beyond-time setting for the redeeming act: "God's grace was given to us in Christ Jesus *pro chronon aionion*—before the beginning of time..." Knowledge of it has only now been brought to light by the revelation of the savior Jesus Christ (verse 10). The meaning of that Greek phrase is another much-debated item,⁵ but it would seem to be an attempt to convey that Christ's redeeming act took place outside the normal boundaries of time and space, in an upper Platonic realm of God.

[For a fuller discussion of this "piece", see Part Two: Who Was Christ Jesus? and Supplementary Articles No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus? and No. 8: Christ as "Man".]

Piece No. 3: A Time of Revelation

How do Paul and other apostles like himself know of their Son and Redeemer? Is it through the words and deeds of Jesus on earth? Through traditions about him going back to those who had

witnessed his ministry? No, Paul has learned of the Son through revelation and scripture. "God chose to reveal his Son through me," he says in Galatians 1:16. The writer of Ephesians, in 3:4-5, gives us the main elements of the new revelatory drama: "The mystery about Christ, which in former generations was not revealed to men, is now disclosed to dedicated apostles and prophets through the Spirit." Paul points to scripture (Romans 1:2, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4) as the source of his gospel, his knowledge about Christ and his saving work. It is God, through the Spirit, who has supplied this gospel, God who has appointed apostles like Paul to carry the message. All of it is couched in revelatory language, with words like *phaneroo*, *apokalupto*, *epiphaneia*.

The existence and role of the divine Son has hitherto been unknown. He has been a secret, a "mystery" hidden for long ages with God in heaven, now revealed together with the benefits of his saving act. This is what Paul and the other epistle writers are constantly telling us: in Romans 3:21f, 16:25-27, Colossians 1:26 and 2:2, 1 Peter 1:20. They trace nothing back to a human Jesus and indeed, as in Titus 1:2-3, often leave no room for such a figure in their picture of the beginnings of the Christian movement.

Instead, they speak of Christ as *now* present on earth (e.g., 1 John 5:20), sent by God as he has also sent the Spirit. (The Spirit and the Son are sometimes linked, as in Romans 8:9, Galatians 4:6, Phil. 1:19.) As the Pauline letters convey through the use of their ubiquitous phrase "in—or through—Christ" (e.g., Romans 6:11, Ephesians 1:4, Titus 3:6), Christ is a spiritual medium through which God is revealing himself and doing his work in the world. He is a mystical force, part of and interacting with his believers, and he is God's agent of salvation. All this lies plainly on the pages of the New Testament epistles, while beside it stands a void on the Gospel Jesus.

[See Part Two: Who Was Christ Jesus? and Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel.]

Piece No. 4: The Mythological Picture of the Times

When we examine the mythological features supposedly conferred upon an historical Jesus so soon after his passing, we find that they all have their roots in contemporary religious philosophy. The developing concept that an increasingly transcendent God required an intermediary in order to have contact with the base world of matter had led to the invention of secondary divine forces in both Greek and Jewish thinking. For the Greeks, as well as philosophers of Hellenistic Judaism like Philo, the Logos (largely an abstract concept) became the Platonic intermediary who was the image of God, the force which had produced creation, and a continual channel of spiritual communion between Deity and humanity.⁶ All these properties are present in the early Christian view of the spiritual Christ.

In Jewish thinking, the figure of personified Wisdom was envisioned as an emanation of God, his communicating aspect and one who brought knowledge of him and his will to humanity. She developed her own myths about coming to the world and inviting men and women to learn from her (as in Proverbs, Baruch, the Wisdom of Solomon). She eventually became very Logos-like, described as God's agent of creation and the divine power that pervades and sustains all things (Wisdom of Solomon 7:22-30). She was God's throne-partner and his very image.

These features, too, are part of the language about Christ used by Paul and his contemporaries. Christ sits at the right hand of God, it was through him that "all things came to be and we through him," (1 Corinthians 8:6); he too sustains the universe by his word of power (Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:15f). Like the Logos and Sophia (Wisdom), only the Son "knows" the Father, and humanity can only know God through the Son.

[See Part Two: Who Was Christ Jesus? and Supplementary Article No. 5: Tracing the Christian Lineage in Alexandria.]

Piece No. 5: Savior Deities in a Layered Universe

The most popular expression of religious faith during the era which saw the rise of Christianity was not the official state religion of "Olympian" gods, but the salvation cults known as the "mystery religions". Each of these had its savior god or goddess, such as Mithras, Dionysos, Attis, Isis, Osiris. Most of these cults possessed myths in which the savior deity had overcome death in some way (not necessarily raised from it), or performed some act whose effects guaranteed for the initiates good fortune in this world and a happy existence in the next. Their rituals included communal sacred meals, often involving such things as bread and wine and bearing strong resemblance to Christian sacramentalism (Paul's Lord's Supper myth may well have been influenced by Mithraic counterparts), and the mystical relationships between initiate and deity are very similar to those expounded by Paul in his branch of Christian belief. While Christianity and the pagan cults interacted on one another as time went on, both can be regarded as more or less independent branches of the same broad, ancient-world tree. [For the mysteries, see Part Two: Who Was Christ Jesus? and Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel: *Learning of a Sacred Meal*, and Response to Miles.]

In the period around the turn of the era, Platonism divided the universe into a timeless, perfect higher realm (containing the "genuine" reality, accessible to the intellect), and an imperfect, transient world of matter as its copy. The mythical activity of the cultic gods was thought to take place in this upper dimension of reality, having effects on humanity below. (Such Platonic-style thinking tended to supplant older views of myth which regarded this activity of gods as having occurred in a primordial, sacred past.) This was combined with other, more popular views which saw the universe as multi-layered, from the world of base matter where humans lived, to the highest level of pure spirit where the ultimate God dwelled. The layers between (usually seven, plus the air or "firmament" between earth and moon) were populated by various sorts of angels, spirits and demons. The latter, responsible for the evils that afflicted mankind and in the Jewish mind associated with Satan, filled the lowest spirit layer and were regarded as part of the realm of "flesh",⁷ cutting off earth from heaven.

To perform their salvific work, the savior gods descended into the lower reaches of the spiritual world, taking on increasing resemblance to lower and material forms: Attis, for example (so Julian the "Apostate" relates in *Orations* V), to the level just above the moon; Christ, so Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 2:8, along with the writer of the Ascension of Isaiah 9, to the sphere of Satan and his powers in the firmament. Here Christ, having assumed the "likeness" of flesh and a man (Ascension 9:13 and Philippians 2:7-8), was crucified. As passages like Ephesians 6:12 indicate, a cosmic battle was going on for control of the world, between the forces of darkness headed by Satan, and the forces of good directed by God. Christ was God's agent, his Messiah, in this struggle. The crucifixion was regarded as a decisive move in the cosmic battle with the demons, wherein Christ subjected these spirits to himself and restored the unity of the universe (Ephesians 1:10). [See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?]

More sophisticated philosophers like Plutarch and Sallustius regarded the stories of the Greek salvation cults as allegorical interpretations only, "eternal meanings clothed in myth." Sallustius, writing in the 4th century, speaks of the story of Attis as "an eternal cosmic process, not an isolated event of the past" (*On Gods and the World*, 9). Paul, while he shows no sign of regarding the myth and suffering of Jesus in anything but literal terms, would have been quite capable of placing such redeeming activity in this upper, spiritual realm, and indeed his language shows every sign of such an interpretation.

[See Part Two: Who Was Christ Jesus? and Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ as "Man": section I.]

Piece No. 6: A Single Story of Jesus

The story of Jesus of Nazareth is, for the first hundred years of Christianity, to be found only in the Gospels. Moreover, each of the Gospels is dependent for that story on the first one written, "Mark". That Matthew and Luke are reworkings of Mark with extra, mostly teaching, material added, is now almost universally accepted. Opinion is split as to whether the narrative elements of John are derived from some Synoptic source as well. But since the Fourth Gospel, despite some considerable revamping to fit John's own theology, gives us no fundamentally different material in its narrative of Jesus' life from that of the Synoptics, it is likely that it too goes back ultimately to the first Gospel for its picture of the "historical Jesus." (The so-called Discourses and distinctive Johannine Christology may well be the earliest layer of tradition, originally applied to a spiritual Revealer Son, upon which the "historical" Synoptic-derived biography has been overlaid.) We thus have a Christian movement spanning half the empire and a full century of existence which nevertheless has managed to produce only one version of the events that are supposed to lie at its inception.

Modern scholars often refer to the common teaching and anecdotal material extracted from Matthew and Luke, now known by the designation "Q", as a "Gospel", though it is not a narrative work, nor organized according to any other fashion than the traditional sayings collection. But their confident claim that the material of this lost document, or at least the earliest stratum of it, can be traced back to an historical Jesus and thus constitutes an independent witness to him is not warranted, as I will try to demonstrate in Part Three [of this article].

Acts, too, as an historical witness to Jesus or the beginnings of the Christian movement, cannot be relied upon. The more recent tendency is to see Acts as a second century product, probably of Roman provenance, highly tendentious and written for the purpose of creating a picture of Christian origins traceable to a unified body of apostles in Jerusalem who were followers of an historical Jesus. Much of it is sheer fabrication, and highly incompatible with information found in the letters of Paul. There is no attestation for Acts prior to the 170s.

[See Part Three: The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth.]

Piece No. 7: The Gospels in Limbo

The dating of the Gospels is partly to be determined by their attestation in the wider Christian writings. Here we run into an astonishing state of affairs, for there is no clear sign of them before the middle of the second century. No surviving writer before Justin makes use of narrative documents containing words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, and more often than not Justin's quotations do not fit our canonical texts, indicating that such works were still in the process of development, not to be finalized until some time later.

Earlier allusions to teachings or anecdotes resembling those of the Gospels seem not to be from written works, but probably reflect developing traditions which themselves found their way into the written Gospels.⁸ And Papias' reference (around 120-130?, as reported by Eusebius) to documents attributed to "Matthew" and "Mark" cannot be reconciled with the narrative Gospels which now go by those names, names which were still unknown to Justin as belonging to his "memoirs of the Apostles". Moreover, these were documents which Papias himself had not seen,⁹ but had learned about from another, making the whole report a distant third hand.

Thus, when scholars regularly date the Gospels between 65 and 100, they present us with a scenario in which the story of Jesus' life as told by the evangelists remains in a limbo and fails to register on the wider Christian consciousness for almost a hundred years after it was first committed to paper. A generally later dating would seem to be required, perhaps with Mark in its initial version coming no earlier than the year 90. (The standard dating based on Mark 13 is not necessarily valid, since apocalyptic expectations continued until at least the end of the century, and Jesus' suggestion in 13:7 is that some time must pass after the Jewish War before the End-time arrives.)

[See Part Three: The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth.]

Piece No. 8: The Gospels Not History

When the content of the Gospels is examined, two fundamental characteristics emerge to cast serious doubt on the historicity of their story of Jesus.

One is their incompatible nature. The irreconcilability of such things as the baptism and nativity stories, the finding of the empty tomb and Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, is, of course, universally recognized, but the myriad other contradictions and disagreements in the accounts of Jesus' words and deeds are more than simple divergences in eyewitness testimony or imperfections in transmission. Since at least the middle of this century, scholars have recognized that the non-agreement between the evangelists, or between an evangelist and his sources, is editorial, deliberate. That is, these writers were consciously redacting their received material according to their own beliefs and purposes, while many Gospel elements are recognized to be the evangelists' own creation. It follows that, if even the purported words of the Lord could be arbitrarily changed or invented for tendentious reasons, there could be no thought of preserving "history". These writers obviously looked upon their stories as artificial products, designed for the needs of their own communities. Such insights have led the last two generations of scholars (and more) to label the Gospels "faith documents", not historical accounts.

The second characteristic is the dependence of so many elements of the Jesus story on passages and motifs from the Jewish scriptures. The Passion story is a veritable pastiche of verses from the Psalms, Isaiah and various other prophets. Overall, it represents the new telling of a tale found repeatedly throughout the Hebrew bible and related writings. Scholars call it The Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One. The story of Jesus' fate follows in virtual lockstep this age-old pattern, its details culled from scriptural passages. No history in view here.

This process of mining the scriptures was a reflection of a traditional Jewish practice known as "midrash", in which the writer interpreted and enlarged upon individual or combinations of passages from the bible to draw out new meanings and relevance, to offer a new truth for contemporary times. One midrashic method was to refashion an existing biblical narrative in a new setting. Thus Jesus was portrayed as a new Moses, with features which paralleled the stories of Moses.

John Shelby Spong (in his *Liberating the Gospels*) regards the Synoptic Gospels as midrashic fiction in virtually every detail, though he believes it was based on an historical man. Spong, building on earlier research by Michael D. Goulder,¹⁰ has argued that the Gospel story was designed to provide suitable lectionary material for year-round Christian observances, based on the traditional cycle of Jewish Sabbath and festival themes. This would entirely remove from the Gospels any semblance of history.[See the book review of Spong's *Liberating the Gospels*.]

[See Part Three: The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth.]

Piece No. 9: A Diverse Patchwork

If Christianity is to be regarded as a single movement, then it is a wildly schizophrenic one. The variety and scale of response to one man defies explanation. The "cultic" expression, epitomized by Paul, apparently abandoned all interest in the earthly life and identity of Jesus and turned him into a cosmic Christ who created the world and redeemed it by his death and resurrection. Individual communities like those responsible for the Q document and the Gospel of Thomas, ignored that death and resurrection and present a teaching Jesus, a preacher of the coming Kingdom of God. In what is probably the earliest stratum of material in the Gospel of John, Jesus is a type of "descending-ascending" redeemer from heaven who saves by being God's revealer (though he reveals nothing about him except that Jesus is his Son and representative); later, John equates Jesus with the Greek Logos. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus is the heavenly High Priest who offers his sacrifice in a heavenly sanctuary, an expression of Alexandrian-style Platonism. In the Didache, Jesus is reduced to a non-suffering intermediary servant/child of God. He is presumed to lie behind the Wisdom-Word-Son mysticism of the Odes of Solomon. In the diverse strands of Gnosticism, Jesus (or Christ) is a mythical part of the heavenly pleroma of Godhead, sometimes a revealer akin to John's, sometimes surfacing under other names like Derdekeas or the Third Illuminator.¹¹ How many other forms of "Jesus" did not survive in extant documents is impossible to tell, though Paul in his letters hints at divergent groups and apostles all over the place, who "preach another Jesus" so different from his own that he can lay curses upon them and accuse them of being agents of Satan.

Scholars like Burton Mack¹² think to find behind the Gospels and other documents all sorts of little groups preserving and formulating this or that type of tradition about Jesus and viewing him in different ways. The Jesus extracted from Q and assigned to a Q community is only the most prominent of these. All this fragmentation of an historical man, the breakup of Jesus into a multitude of component parts, is an unprecedented phenomenon, and not only does no document exist which embodies such a process or even gives a clue as to why it took place, each of these component parts seems blissfully unaware of the others. Paul's letters give no hint that there were communities centered around the very elements of Jesus' life and preaching which he had abandoned as of no interest. On the other hand, communities like that of Q seem impervious to the cosmic dimensions which the cultic circles have bestowed upon their preacher of the Kingdom. Only the evangelists (which is to say, the first of them, Mark) thought to bring these disparate elements together. The question is, where did all the various elements come from, and were they associated with a human Jesus in their pre-Gospel stages?

[See Part Three: The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth, and the book review of Burton Mack's *Who Wrote the New Testament?*]

Piece No. 10: The Second Century

If the historical Jesus seems unknown to all in the first century but the early evangelists (and, in a different sense, the later redactors of Q), the first stirrings of a "knowledge" of an historical Jesus emerge soon after the second century gets under way. Ignatius in his letters (by tradition written around 107 while on his way to martyrdom in Rome) offers the earliest non-Gospel reference to Jesus as a man born of Mary at the time of Herod and crucified by Pontius Pilate. Shortly after, Tacitus' reference appears, the first in non-Christian literature identifying Jesus as an historical man who was executed at the time of Pilate. Polycarp (writing about 130?), reflects the same outlook as Ignatius, and the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 120?) seems to regard Jesus as an historical man, but the writer is still dependent on scripture for much of what he assigns to this figure. If

Eusebius is to be relied upon, Papias too reflects a belief in an historical Jesus (in Asia Minor), and he witnesses (at second hand) to some circulating collections of sayings and possibly anecdotes that have become associated with this figure.

And yet, there are major Christian writings of the second century which fail to present an historical Jesus. Both the *Didache* (which may have roots in the late first century) and the monumental *Shepherd of Hermas* are devoid of any such figure; the latter never utters the name Jesus. Even the New Testament epistles generally dated in the early second century, 2 Peter and the three Pastorals, seem to lack an historical man. (The sole reference to Pilate in the New Testament epistles, 1 Timothy 6:13, has been examined with some suspicion by certain commentators¹³, since it doesn't seem to fit the context well. I regard it, along with 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, as an interpolation.)

Most astonishingly, all the major apologists before the year 180, with the sole exception of Justin (and a minor apologist from Syria, Aristides), fail to include an historical Jesus in their defences of Christianity to the pagans. This includes Tatian in his pre-*Diatessaron* days. Instead, the apologists bear witness to a Christian movement which is grounded in Platonic philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism, preaching the worship of the monotheistic Jewish God and a Logos-type Son; the latter is a force active in the world who serves as revealer and intermediary between God and humanity. Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras of Athens, Tatian in his *Apology*, Minucius Felix in Rome (or North Africa) offer no beliefs in an historical figure crucified as an atoning act, nor in a resurrection. (Nor do they have anything in common with Paul.) In not one of them does the name Jesus appear, and none speak of an incarnation of their Logos. Theophilus explains the meaning of the name "Christian" as signifying that "we are anointed with the oil of God."

Minucius Felix heaps scorn on any doctrine of a crucified man as divine and redeemer (indicating that he is aware of some who hold to such a thing), while Tatian alludes to "stories" told by both Greeks and Christians, implying that both are of the same nature, mythical tales not to be taken literally. Only Justin has embraced the story and the figure as presented in some early form of written Gospel, but even he, in recounting his conversion experience of a couple of decades earlier (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 3-8), shows a telltale void about belief in an historical man in the faith movement he joined. Into Trypho's mouth (8:6) he places the accusation that "you invent a Christ for yourselves."

[See The Second Century Apologists]

Part Two

Problem Solutions To The Puzzle

If these are the salient pieces of the documentary record of the time, how have scholars traditionally tried to put them together? Almost universally, they have taken the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, which is attested to only in Gospels beginning in the late first century, and placed him prior to the earliest records—the letters of Paul and other epistles of the New Testament—which themselves contain no sign of him. To compensate for this absence in the early record, they have extracted elements from the Gospels and attempted to trace roots of these back to the supposed time of Jesus, thinking to uncover words and deeds which can be attributed to him. These attempted excavations will be evaluated later.

But the other anomaly which scholars have had to address is perhaps even more challenging. If Jesus died around 30 CE, and was no more than a charismatic preacher of the Kingdom (not too charismatic, since he sank without a trace in all the non-Christian record of the first century), how are we to explain the manner in which he is presented in the earliest surviving Christian writings which begin no more than two decades after his death, and which would seem to contain older elements reaching back to a time when he had scarcely been laid in his grave?

Scholars have long realized that early Christian writers present us with a thoroughly divine Christ. They acknowledge that Paul, together with the cultic circles he represents, has made a leap so far beyond the human Jesus portrayed in the Gospels that the latter figure has been completely lost sight of. Herman Ridderbos is only one of a multitude of voices expressing the same resounding perplexity:

"No one who examines the Gospels...and then reads the epistles of Paul can escape the impression that he is moving in two entirely different spheres....When Paul writes of Jesus as the Christ, historical and human traits appear to be obscure, and Christ appears to have significance only as a transcendent divine being." (*Paul and Jesus*, p.3). He goes on to ask: "Jesus was not dead the length of a human lifetime before his stature was not only infinitely increased, but also entirely changed. How did this come about?"

Others, such as Rudolf Bultmann,¹⁴ have put the situation in different terms: that the early church almost immediately lost all interest in the human life lived by its Master and placed its entire focus on his nature and role as the Crucified and Risen Lord. Not even the pinnacle of salvation history, the event of the cross, is located upon the hill of Calvary, nor his resurrection placed in the context of an empty tomb outside Jerusalem. Norman Perrin¹⁵ has presented a picture of the early church which made no real distinction, he says, between the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ, seeing both figures as continuous. This made no clarification necessary between what Jesus on earth had said and what he continued to say in his new spiritual state (an attempt to explain why nothing of the former actually appears, stated as such, in the record).

In all these scenarios, there are difficulties which commentators have been reluctant to face, difficulties which make many of their assumptions virtually impossible.

Against the Jewish Grain

The first difficulty is that the vast majority of the earliest Christians were, of course, Jews. "God is One," says the most fundamental of Jewish theological tenets. Moreover, the Jewish mind had an obsession against associating anything human with God. He could not be represented by even the suggestion of a human image, and Jews in their thousands had bared their necks before Pilate's swords simply to protest against the mounting of military standards bearing Caesar's image within sight of the Temple. The idea that a man was a literal part of God would have been met by any Jew with horror and apoplexy.

And yet we are to believe that Jews were immediately led to elevate Jesus of Nazareth to divine levels unprecedented in the entire history of human religion. We are to believe not only that they identified a crucified criminal with the ancient God of Abraham, but that they went about the empire and practically overnight converted huge numbers of other Jews to the same outrageous—and thoroughly blasphemous—proposition. Within a handful of years of Jesus' supposed death, we know of Christian communities in many major cities of the empire, all presumably having accepted that a man they had never met, crucified as a political rebel on a hill outside Jerusalem, had risen from the dead and was in fact the pre-existent Son of God, creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world.

Since many of the Christian communities Paul worked in existed before he got there, and since Paul's letters do not support the picture Acts paints of intense missionary activity on the part of the Jerusalem group around Peter and James, history does not record who performed this astounding feat.¹⁶

Moreover, it was apparently done without any need for justification. There is not a murmur in any Pauline letter, nor in any other epistle, that Christians had to defend such an outlandish doctrine. No one seems to challenge Christian preaching on these grounds, for the point is never addressed. Even in 1 Corinthians 1:18-24, where Paul defends the "wisdom of God" (meaning the message he preaches) against the "wisdom of the world", he fails to provide any defense for, or even a mention of, the elevation of Jesus of Nazareth to divinity. He can admit that to the Greeks and Jews the doctrine of the cross—that is, the idea of a crucified Messiah—is "folly" and "a stumbling block." But this has nothing to do with turning a man into God, a piece of folly he never discusses or defends. That his opponents, and the Jewish establishment in general, would not have challenged him on this basic Christian position, forcing him to provide some justification, is inconceivable.

A Reticent Preaching Movement

Could any apostle have maintained such a silence in his missionary activities? If Paul were preaching a man who was God, would not his listeners and converts have demanded to know about the life of this man, his sayings and deeds? Whether Paul liked it or not, the human Jesus would have become a focus of discussion between himself and his congregations, details of which would certainly surface in his letters. None do.

Paul could hardly have set out on a career to bring the message about Jesus to the gentile all across the known world without possessing a certain amount of information about the man he intended to preach. Yet what effort did he make to acquire such information? During the first 17 years following his conversion, and after waiting three of those years, he spent exactly two weeks in Jerusalem with the men who had presumably known Jesus in his ministry and were the custodians of that information. All he did at the time, so he tells us (Galatians 1:18-19), was "get

to know Peter" and see James. Did they give him a crash course in their memories of Jesus' life and ministry? Paul gives no hint of such a thing, and no details are ever relayed to his readers.

Christianity was in competition with the Graeco-Roman mystery cults, with many salvation messages spread by wandering philosophers and devotees of the cultic gods. An important benefit offered by these deities was protection against the evil spirits. Yet the pseudo-Pauline Colossians and Ephesians, which have a special interest in these matters, fail to point out that, unlike the other savior deities, Christ had been incarnated in flesh and blood in recent history. He had experienced and countered such demonic forces first hand, on earth. He had demonstrated his power over them through his miracles, exorcising them from sick people. In his ministry, Jesus had shown compassion, tolerance, generosity, all those things men and women thirsted for in confronting a hostile, uncaring world. It is simply unthinkable that Paul or anyone else would ignore or lose interest in all these advantages of the human Jesus when presenting to their listeners, gentile or Jew, the Christian agent of salvation.

Starring Jesus in a Mythological Drama

Robert Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar, in his *Honest to Jesus*,¹⁷ is at pains to point out that Christianity developed as a clash between "the cult of Christ" and "the gospel of Jesus." Paul is supposed to have been the main culprit in creating the former and blocking access to the latter. Funk admits that the cultic branch is entirely mythic in character, that it was strongly influenced by scripture and hellenistic savior cult ideas of a dying/rising god. Yet how could hellenistic mythological ideas have made such strong and sudden inroads into the thinking of those who followed the human Jesus? What, in anyone's mind, would a counter-culture preacher of the Kingdom, executed by the Roman authorities for some kind of perceived subversion, possibly have had to do with mythic savior gods and world redemption which could have led anyone to cast him so thoroughly in this mold—to the exclusion of all trace of the preaching original?

Scholars have long tried to offer scenarios to explain this process. One runs like this: In their fervor and distress following the crucifixion, the followers of Jesus scrambled to understand what had just happened, to interpret the meaning of their Master's life, to put a name to his role in God's plan. They ran to their bibles and began to apply all manner of scriptural passages to him, especially those looked upon as messianic by the Jewish thinking of the time. But they turned as well to contemporary hellenistic mythology about the Logos, supplementing it with the Jewish equivalent in the figure of personified Wisdom, throwing in for good measure dim (to us) myths about descending-ascending heavenly redeemers. Those early Christian thinkers absorbed all this vast cultural pleroma and decided that their Jesus of Nazareth had in fact been the true embodiment of all these myths and proceeded to pile them, willy-nilly, upon him. This "morning after" ransack of current philosophy and the Jewish scriptures led, so they say, to the highly elevated, mythological picture created of Jesus so soon after his death, and to a conviction that he had been "resurrected".

The first thing we have to ask ourselves is: who did all this? It was hardly a circle of simple fishermen around Jesus, like Peter or the sons of Zebedee, who as the Gospels portray them could probably barely read, let alone turn themselves practically overnight into Philonic-type exegetes of the Septuagint and contemporary Greek philosophy. If it was Paul alone, how could he ever have worked with the Jerusalem circle of apostles? In fact, his letters show no dispute on such a score; he enjoyed close contact and cooperation with the group around Peter, even if it could sometimes be an uneasy relationship. If it was a larger circle of more sophisticated minds of which Paul's is the only name to come down to us, one perhaps based in Antioch as some suggest: whatever gave such a group the impetus to do this? To apply to a crucified preacher whom they had never personally experienced, the loftiest philosophical and religious concepts of

their day? And where is the evidence for the split which would surely have taken place in the early Christian movement between such head-in-the-clouds philosophers and a simpler core of disciples who had followed the human Jesus and heard him preach, a preaching in which he would scarcely have presented himself in these terms? There is not the slightest evidence of any disagreement in the ranks over such mythologizing tendencies.

This raises another question. How is one to explain how all this mythologizing of a recent man gained such wide acceptance? It might be one thing to say that certain followers of Jesus (whoever they may have been) were so immersed in religious arcana as to see nothing unusual in casting their Master in these mythological terms. It is quite another to understand how the average man or woman who was approached with a Christian message like this could so readily embrace it. Such claims for a recent man (who hardly claimed such things for himself), especially one executed as a subversive, would have been met with laughter or blank stares—as, no doubt, would the claim that he had risen from his tomb. What could possibly explain why so many apparently made such a bizarre leap of faith?

Even if such mythological motifs were current in the cultural consciousness of the day, how difficult would it be to persuade the hearer that all these myths, hitherto familiar in a spiritual context only, should now be applied to a human being—a crucified criminal? Early Christian preaching would have had to center around the justification for all this, yet this is precisely what is missing from the earliest correspondence.

One-Sided Interpretations

Scholars have had a traditional way of describing the application of philosophical and scriptural content to Jesus in the early literature, from Hebrews' High Priest making the sacrifice of his own blood in the heavenly sanctuary to Paul's pre-existent Son. This, they say, was an "interpretation" of the man and the role he was now seen to have played. But how are we to understand an "enterpretation" when the thing being interpreted is never mentioned?

Suzanne Lehne, for example, in her study of Hebrews (*The New Covenant in Hebrews*, p.27), explains that scripture helped the author "articulate his beliefs" about "the Christ event." But nowhere in Hebrews does the author intimate that he is articulating any historical Christ event, and in fact, a reference in scripture is usually treated as though it is *part* of that event, not an explanation of something else, let alone recent history. It is from scripture that the "event" of Christ has been constructed; these are not "proof-texts" but "source-texts".

John Knox, in *Myth and Truth* (p.59), explains Ephesians 1:3-10 as a kind of hymn created to explain Jesus in entirely supernatural terms. He speaks of "the remembered man Jesus," and "the wonder of his deeds and words." But where are these things in Ephesians 1:3-10 or anywhere else? We cannot accept Knox's claim that the myth in Ephesians is built upon "historical data" when that data is never pointed to. A better explanation would be that the historical data has been added to the myth at a later time. Knox, like New Testament scholarship in general, is guilty of reading into the early Christian mythological presentation of the divine Christ the historical context derived from the later Gospels. The Christ myth as an interpretation of an historical event is a fantasy.

New Forays into Christian Origins

Newer scenarios about how the Christian movement began and how Jesus became the Christ have attempted to be more subtle and comprehensive. Burton Mack suggests¹⁸ that, in addition to Galilean groups who regarded Jesus as no more than a human teacher, gentile circles in places

like Antioch were responsible, over a period of time, for applying current mythological interpretations to Jesus of Nazareth, and that Paul was converted to one of these "cults". But this scenario has problems. Jews still made up a sizeable component of the community in Antioch. Did they simply allow gentiles to persuade them to betray the most cherished principles of their Jewish heritage? The idea of gradual evolution (Mack suggests it took place over a period of 25 years) is belied by pre-Pauline elements like the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11, which are likely, as Mack admits, very early developments. As for Paul himself (according to information in Galatians¹⁹), his conversion was also too early to allow the time needed for such processes to take place, especially in distant centers. And are we to believe that he too—a Jew born and bred, so he tells us—swallowed the blasphemous proposition that a man was God, as a result of some gentile sucker-punch? Even among those gentiles, such an elevation of a human man would have been unprecedented and far from easy.

For we must still answer the question "why". What would have led Paul, or gentiles off in northern Syria, to take a simple preacher, whom they knew only by report, and turn him into a cosmic deity, no matter what their diet of hellenistic mystery ideas? The appeal could not have been in his message and charisma as a teacher, since they immediately stripped off this skin and discarded it. If Paul had no interest in the teacher and his teachings, of what use was this Jesus to him as a candidate for divine redeemer? Both Mack and Robert Funk²⁰ speak of the Pauline cult's point of departure as the fact of Jesus' "noble death", but noble deaths are common enough in history, including Jewish history, and rarely if ever do they lead to divinization on so exalted a scale. The simple fact of a reputed noble death would hardly have led an educated, observant Jew like Paul to contravene the most sacred precepts of his heritage and associate this particular man, one he had never met, with God.

In any event, the cultic presentation of Jesus' crucifixion does not fit the "noble death" scenario. The latter is classically of the warrior or teacher who dies for his country, his followers, his teachings. These things focus on a life, a cause: in Judaism, it is invariably for the sake of the Law. This is precisely what is missing in the Christ cult, which has nothing to do with Jesus' life, teachings or followers. Dying for sin is not in the same category, especially when placed in the spirit realm; this is a mystical, spiritual concept.

Listening For a Footstep . . .

It would seem that the "straightforward proposition" with which this article began is not compatible with Piece No. 2, "A Transcendent Christ", for no feasible path can be traced from the presumed historical Jesus to the earliest expression (as a cosmic redeeming deity) found about him in the early Christian record. No acceptable explanation can be found for why such a leap would have been made in the first place, who made it, how Jewish sensibilities could have been overcome, and why in the process the human man who presumably started it all would have completely disappeared into a black hole.

When we add Piece No. 3, "A Time of Revelation", we find that Paul and others are, in fact, making it impossible to assume that they identify the beginning of the faith movement with an historical man. Through passages like Romans 16:25, Colossians 1:26, Ephesians 3:5, etc., they tell us that this is a time of revelation about the Son through the medium of the Spirit and the holy scriptures. These secrets "hidden for long generations" are only now being unveiled to the world through apostles like Paul, not through any historical Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18, Paul tells his readers: "From first to last this has been the work of God,²¹ who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, having given us the ministry of reconciliation." It is apostles like Paul who have been "entrusted by God with the message of reconciliation"

(v.19). That Paul is not sharing the limelight with any recent Jesus of Nazareth and *his* ministry is also borne out in an earlier passage, with not even a "through Christ" to temper the personal eulogy. It begins (3:5-6): "Such qualification as we have comes from God; it is he who has qualified us to dispense his new covenant."

Paul's total disregard for the role of Jesus himself in dispensing the new covenant is astounding. But he goes on to say that the old covenant had been inaugurated with divine splendor, as reflected in the face of Moses. He asks, "Must not even greater splendor rest upon (be reflected in) the divine dispensation of the Spirit?" Paul has passed over any splendor which might have been contained in the face of Jesus and his career, and settles on that of the missionary movement, impelled by the Spirit sent from God. "How much more," he asks, "shall the ministry of righteousness" —meaning his own ministry— "abound in glory?" (Here my translation.) "The splendor that once was (i.e., in the old covenant) is now...outshone by a splendor greater still." To this mansion of glory in which Paul has taken up residence, Jesus is not even let in by the servants' entrance!

Such passages ignore any role Jesus might have played in recent salvation history, but what of those which leave absolutely no room for it? Titus 1:3, speaking in Paul's name, is a good example: "Yes, it is eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, and now in his own good time he has openly declared himself in the proclamation which was entrusted to me by ordinance of God our Savior." There is not a crack in this facade where Jesus could gain a foothold. In the past lie God's promises of eternal life, and his first action on those promises is the present revelation to apostles like Paul who have gone out to proclaim the message. Jesus' own proclamation of eternal life, his own person as the embodiment of that life (as the Gospel of John so memorably puts it), has evaporated into the wind.

1 Peter (1:12) declares that the things the prophets told of have now been announced, not by Jesus in his own ministry, but "by those preaching the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven." Titus 2:4 and 3:4 speak of what has "dawned upon the world" in the present. Rather than Jesus himself, it is "the grace of God" and "the kindness and generosity of God our Savior." Scholars, when they have allowed themselves to worry about such things, declare these to be metaphorical references to Jesus of Nazareth. This is an interpretation born of desperation.

... And a Voice

If the movement began with a man who preached on earth, we are at a loss to explain how even the simple knowledge or presentation of this feature cannot be found in any early strand of the documentary evidence. Compounding this puzzlement is the presence in many epistles of moral teachings and maxims familiar from the Gospel record (including some of Q's "authentic" sayings), yet without the slightest attribution to its Jesus figure.²² From the Beatitudes to pronouncements on love, to judging and oaths and approaching God and loving enemies and turning the other cheek, not to mention dozens of apocalyptic sentiments which are found in Jesus' mouth in the Gospels, none are presented as the voice of Jesus. Some are said to come directly from God, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, while others (such as Paul's "words of the Lord") are regarded as the product of inspiration from the spiritual Christ in heaven. Scholarly commentaries are full of expressions of surprise and perplexity on all this silence about the product of the teaching Jesus.²³

A quick look at Romans 10 and 11 should convince any unprejudiced observer that Paul knows of no historical preaching Jesus. (I'll leave it to the reader to consult this passage.) He seeks to emphasize the Jews' guilt in not responding to the message delivered by apostles like himself, even though they have had every opportunity to do so. And yet he fails to include the

opportunity offered by Jesus' very own person and preaching. Several points in 10:11-21 cry out for some reference, some hint, of the historical ministry, yet none is forthcoming.²⁴ Paul then goes on in chapter 11 to refer to the longstanding myth of the Jews killing their prophets sent from God, yet not a murmur is heard of the killing of the Son of God himself. Nothing can explain away these silences.

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with the statement that "in this final age (God) has spoken to us through the Son," and then proceeds to give us not a word spoken by this Son—at least not in any historical, earthly setting. Rather, the Son's voice comes out of the sacred writings; scripture is his platform. In 10:5 the Son speaks in a kind of "mythical present" through a passage from Psalm 40 (actually, 39 LXX).

*"That is why, at his coming into the world, he says:
'Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire,
But thou hast prepared a body for me.
Whole-offerings and sin-offerings thou didst not delight in.
Then I said: "Here am I: as it is written of me in the scroll,
I have come, O God, to do thy will.." ' "*

In this one passage we can see the type of source which gave rise to the idea that the spiritual Son had taken on or entered "flesh" (at first this was envisioned within the lower spiritual realm: see Piece No. 5), and the idea that this Son had undergone sacrifice. For the writer of Hebrews, Christ's was the ultimate sacrifice which would supplant once for all the sacrifices of the Temple cult which God no longer wanted. The idea of "his coming into the world" is not presented in any historical sense, much less in the context of a Gospel story, but scholars have often struggled to try to relate these verses to an earthly incarnation. Paul Ellingworth however, realizes that the "he says" is "a timeless present referring to the permanent record of scripture."²⁵ This removes it from any historical context.

We are skirting Platonic ideas here, with their concept of a higher world of timeless reality. It is in this spiritual world that Christ operates, as Hebrews' portrayal of the sacrifice offered in the heavenly sanctuary clearly indicates. The "coming into the world" is still a mythical one, as is the idea of operating "in flesh".²⁶

In the same vein, Ephesians 2:17 is especially interesting. "And coming, he (Christ) proclaimed the good news..." But what was the content of that news? Instead of taking the opportunity to refer to some teachings of Jesus' presumed ministry, the writer quotes Isaiah. (Even the introductory phrase quoted above is based on Isaiah 52:7.) Like Hebrews, the Son is envisioned as speaking through the sacred writings. The Son inhabits the spiritual world of the scriptures, God's newly-opened window onto the unseen true reality.²⁷ It is the "coming" of that voice, perceived through revelation and a fresh reading of scripture, which has launched the new age and the Christian movement.

Part Three

Solving The Jesus Puzzle

We are led to conclude that the beginning of the Christian movement was not a response to any human individual at one time and location. Christianity was born in a thousand places, out of the fertile religious and philosophical soil of the time, expressing faith in an intermediary Son who was a channel to God, providing knowledge, love and salvation. It sprang up in many innovative minds like Paul's, among independent communities and sects all over the empire, producing a variety of forms and doctrines. Some of it tapped into traditional Jewish Messiah expectation and apocalyptic sentiment, other expressions were tied to more Platonic ways of thinking. Greek mystery concepts also fed into the volatile mix. Many groups (though not all) adopted the term "Christ" for their divine figure, as well as the name "Jesus", which in Hebrew has the meaning of "Savior". Paul and the Jerusalem brotherhood around Peter and James were simply one strand of this broad salvation movement, although an important and ultimately very influential one. Later, in a mythmaking process of its own, the Jerusalem circle with Paul as its satellite was adopted as the originating cell of the whole Christian movement.

But there was another factor involved. New reform impulses and moral concerns were in the air as well, both as part of the many manifestations of the Christ movement and on their own among other, non-cultic circles who preached a coming End-time and transformation of the world. All these groups tended to produce ethical teachings, parables of the Kingdom, stories of conflict experiences. In the end, this increasing store of sectarian expression impelled the creation of a new, artificial figure: the one who had originated such things. Within the cultic movement, this process eventually led to the Proclaimed being brought to earth and turned into the Proclaimer.

That such teaching and Kingdom material had originally nothing to do with any one individual, much less a Jesus of Nazareth, is a possibility yet to be addressed by New Testament scholarship, and thus the search for the "genuine" historical Jesus as preacher and prophet goes on.²⁸ The Jesus Seminar and others have declared him unearthed from the roots of Q, a first century document produced by Jewish circles in Galilee preaching the Kingdom of God.

Excavating the Q Foundations

The modern analysis of Q²⁹ as an evolutionary accumulation of three differentiated layers of material, is undoubtedly reliable. Yet it offers us a Jesus who is an anomaly: a Jewish preacher who yet shows no interest in things Jewish, for in the so-called Q1 layer, we hear a cosmopolitan, very un-Jewish voice, one that bears a strong resemblance to Cynic preaching and practice; this was a Greek counterculture movement of the time spread by wandering Cynic sages.³⁰ Moreover, these sayings sound like the product of a school or lifestyle, developed over time and hardly the sudden invention of a single mind. When certain Q1 material turns up in other venues (with the exception of the Gospel of Thomas: see below), it is never attributed to a Jesus but seems (as Laws observes) to be part of a general stock of ethical material, probably adopted by many reform-minded groups during this period. If a real man were the source of this teaching and the impulse to the formation of a preaching movement, why does he come down to us in such a meager, tortuous fashion?

We need to be suspicious also at the about-face evidenced by the Q2 material. From teachings which seem so cosmopolitan, open-minded and full of visions of the ideal society, not to mention so lacking in Jewish orientation and concerns, how does the community proceed, within supposedly only a few years, to the harsh, punitive, narrow-minded apocalyptic fulmination of the Q2 sayings, whose atmosphere and interests are quite definitely of a Jewish and sectarian nature? Does this not point to the strong possibility that the Q1 material comes from an external

source, adopted (and perhaps adapted) by a Q community which turns out not to be quite so admirable and visionary as starry-eyed commentators would like to portray them? The common explanation that tensions resulting from rejection caused this about-face do not seem to be adequate, especially to account for the stark shift to Jewish apocalypticism.

There are other telltale signs in the second layer of Q that all this condemnation was originally directed at a failure to respond to the community's preaching of the Kingdom, not to the teaching or person of Jesus. The apocalyptic Son of Man sayings are not identified with Jesus, which is why, when they were later placed in his mouth, Jesus sounds as though he is talking about someone else. John the Baptist in the Q2 layer (3:7-19) prophesies an eschatological judge, not a teacher-founder Jesus. The saying found in Luke 16:16 is especially revealing: "Until John there was the Law and the prophets; since then, there is the good news of the kingdom of God." This, like so much of Q, is acknowledged to be a product of the community's own experience and time (i.e., not going back to Jesus), and yet no reference to Jesus himself has been worked into this picture of the change from the old to the new. Luke 11:49 also leaves out the Son of God when speaking of those whom Wisdom promised to send.

In fact, that verse and others point to the source of the Q1 sayings as perceived by the later community. They were the product of, or inspired by, personified Wisdom. The Q1 stage is recognized as "sapiential," that is, an instructional collection in the same genre as traditional "wisdom" books like Proverbs. John is identified as a "child of Wisdom", and so was Jesus (Lk. 7:35) when he was introduced into the picture: see below.

Commentators like Mack have attempted to explain why Q contains no hint of Jesus' death, let alone a resurrection. All fall back on the idea that news of such an event did not reach them in Galilee, or that it held no interest for them. Neither explanation is acceptable. The group which "remained" in Jerusalem is said to have had roots in Galilee which would certainly have remained active. And if there is one prominent motif to be found in Q's second layer, it is the theme of the killing of the prophets. Had the founder's fate been execution, there is no way this would not eventually have been seized on and incorporated into the community's consciousness. The alternative (something Mack tentatively suggests) is that there was no death—at least not a memorable one, no execution by the authorities at all. Of course, this places the burden on the cultic side of things: if Jesus died a natural death, what historical fuel drove Paul and his fellows to build their mythic crucifixion? An impossible situation either way.

Filling In the Gaps

One of the great anomalies in Q is the lack of any contexts for the majority of its sayings. The few that have them can be located in the Q3 layer. For every single Q1 and Q2 saying, Matthew and Luke have been forced to provide their own contexts and set-up lines within their picture of Jesus' ministry. Not even something like the Lord's Prayer is given a common setting between the two Synoptic evangelists. If the community had associated these sayings with a Jesus right from the beginning, and taking into account the amount of redaction the document underwent through its various stages, it is virtually impossible that over the course of time some of these would not have had little context references added to them (whether accurately preserved or simply invented), so that Matthew and Luke would betray some presence of such things. Only a handful of anecdotes, like the dialogue between Jesus and John, or the Capernaum miracle, show any such development, and these bear signs of being late, of tendentious redaction. They are composite creations, put together out of earlier discrete units.

This can be illustrated by a comparison with the Gospel of Thomas. This too presents itself as a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus and has been enlisted in support of the 'discovery' of

Jesus at the roots of Q. Thomas shows far less development than Q. Most of its sayings are prefaced only by a simple "Jesus said," while a few have scraps of set-up lines. Like Q, it contains no death and resurrection motifs.

But there is some form of relationship between the two documents, and since the Gospel of Thomas contains the more primitive form of those sayings they hold in common, most of which are located at the Q1 level, we can deduce that the roots of Thomas split off from Q at an early stage of Q development (or possibly vice-versa). The identification with Jesus could have been added at any later time in reaction to the widespread development of an historical figure, probably some time in the first half of the 2nd century. (The unearthed copy of Thomas is based on a Greek version which goes back to the mid second century.)

Thomas confirms that the evolution of Q involved stages of considerable recasting, including joining individual sayings into dialogues and anecdotes (a common practice of the period). A simple saying in Thomas, #78, where it would seem to refer to Jesus, appears in Q in an extended construction, the dialogue between Jesus and John (Lk. 7:18-35), where it is made to apply to John. This is a dead giveaway that the Q pericope is an invention. The set of three chreic responses in Q1 (Lk. 9:57-62) are similarly shown to be later redacted units.

Thus, all the signs point to no Jesus in the earlier layers of Q.

Q's Founder Emerges

When and why did the idea of a founder figure emerge in the Q community's thinking? It appeared at the Q3 level, when certain dialogue, pronouncement and miracle anecdotes were constructed or revamped from earlier material to embody him, and minor changes were made to some individual sayings to reflect his voice.

Reform impulses and apocalyptic expectations are things which solidify groups of like-minded people into sects, set against the wider world around them which largely rejects such extreme messages and thus receives the sect's condemnation. Q2 preserves the community's hostile reaction to rejection, and even Paul itemizes the suffering he has endured at the hands of those unreceptive to his gospel. When groups become more sectarianized, certain social phenomena take place. Attitudes of "inside" and "outside" solidify. A bulwark is created to defend against attack. Community practices need to be justified, and the beliefs of those who now consider themselves an elect must be supported.

Thus the sect's view of its theology and history tends to evolve to serve the primary purpose of filling its needs as a distinct and isolated social group. The past is reconstructed to render it sacred. Current faith and teaching, ritual and practice, are bolstered by showing that such things had been there from the beginning, that they had been formulated under divine auspices, in inspiring circumstances, and preferably by a heroic founder figure with a pipeline to the deity—perhaps even sent by, or a part of, the deity itself.

This process can be seen in the evolution of Q. Q1 is a body of Cynic-style material, probably ultimately from a Greek source. Perhaps Mack is right in postulating a cosmopolitan Galilee, a strongly hellenistic environment in which certain Jewish circles began preaching the Kingdom. Here Jews could absorb foreign ideas without difficulty, and may have adopted Greek Cynic material as providing a suitable ethic for their Kingdom movement.

However, opposition from an unreceptive environment soon led to the formulation of prophetic and condemnatory sayings, together with little anecdotes (also of a Cynic nature) embodying the

conflict between sect and establishment. Q2 added the darker side of sectarianism and apocalyptic expectation to the original body of enlightened, cosmopolitan material. No Jesus had yet spoken such things. This was still a record of the community's own teachings and articulated stance toward others. And the sect may originally have regarded itself as spokespersons for the Wisdom of God. Her presence within the community's thinking is revealed by Luke in 11:49: "That is why the Wisdom of God said..." Instead of "Jesus said" at the earlier stages of Q, it may have been "Wisdom said".

That chink left open by Luke may well reveal the entire early landscape of Q, a landscape empty of any Jesus figure at all, peopled by a preaching movement inspired from heaven and working under Wisdom's direction. As she had done throughout Israel's past, Wisdom had sent this culminating wave of messengers to proclaim God's salvation, and as in the past, they had received hostility, rejection, even death.

But Wisdom was not the ideal founder figure, for she was only a spiritual entity. What the Q community needed was a human, heroic progenitor, one who had actually spoken the sayings, done the deeds, set the precedents. The very existence of the sayings collection would have invited attribution to an originating and authoritative figure. And so, Wisdom was transformed into her ideal representative, a "child of Wisdom". Matthew in his use of Q reflects a further evolving attitude to Jesus as the very incarnation of Wisdom herself, and many of Jesus' sayings in Q are recognized as borrowed Wisdom sayings.

But this founder figure was not yet cast as divine, and the term "Christ" is never used of him. He is not envisioned as the Messiah, though he takes on the identity of "the coming one" when he becomes associated with the Son of Man, and there seem to be intimations of divinity which come in at the final phase of Q in the form of the Temptation Story. Nor is he a redeemer, for there is no soteriology attached to Jesus in any stage of Q. He is simply a glorified embodiment of the Q preachers themselves, doing what the Q people had done from the beginning, only better. He opened the door for men and women's entry into the new Kingdom.

Of course, John the Baptist had to be realigned, and so he was recast as the forerunner, the herald to whom the founder Jesus had been superior. This would also put the rival followers of John the Baptist (by now perhaps a separate sect) in their place. This rivalry, together with the fact that John had not been known as a Wisdom teacher, may have precluded any tendency to make John himself the founder of the Q sect.

Q and the Gospels

How do we relate the latest phase of Q to the developing Gospels? On one level and in the same manner as Q, the Gospels are creations motivated by the sectarian needs discussed above. They are foundation documents which embody the principles of the sect's faith and practice and its stance toward the outside world. That "foundation" is fictionalized in a mythic tale about a founder figure, a tale which does two things: it translates the redeeming spirit-realm activities of its deity into an earthly setting, and it adds the epitomization of the work and beliefs of the Markan community itself, focusing these on its Jesus of Nazareth.

The Markan Jesus, as intermediary Son and Redeemer, has been drawn from the cultic Christ of the Pauline type (although there seems to be no direct use of the specific ideas of Paul, unless the Lord's Supper myth has come from Paul through indirect channels). This makes it likely that the Markan community was a cultic group to begin with.³¹ But Mark also betrays Q-like traditions, and a debate still rages as to whether he also had access to some form of Q, or perhaps had come in oral contact with members of the Q community.³²

The key question then becomes: did Mark, in casting his Christ in a human character and local setting, draw on recently developed conceptions about a founder figure in the Q community? Did the Q Jesus serve as a model or inspiration for Mark's Jesus of Nazareth? Without a copy of the Q document itself, Mark may have had little of substance about this figure to draw on, and thus we find the curious paucity of teachings in Mark's Gospel,³³ and the absence of almost any of the Q anecdotes incorporated by Matthew and Luke.

In any event, the Q traditions lacked biographical and contextual elements, so Mark had only scripture to draw on for detail to flesh out his Jesus "biography". This, as modern scholarship has come to realize, was founded on the principles of midrash and modelled on the story of the Suffering Righteous One. It is very possible that Mark, and perhaps Matthew and Luke (and even John), regarded their midrashic tale as symbolic only, and its Jesus figure as not historical. In such a state, these early versions of the Gospels would have remained in that limbo for a generation or more, undisseminated beyond their own communities, until wider forces and new interpretations led the evangelists' Jesus of Nazareth out onto the historical stage.

Finally, it has been suggested that various first century preacher/Zealots and would-be Messiah figures who agitated for revolutionary or apocalyptic change, and were usually dispatched by the military authorities (perhaps one was even executed by Pilate!), provided a partial model for the creation of Mark's Jesus figure, or perhaps even that of Q at some stage. But this is a far cry from saying that the Gospel Jesus represents an historical figure in any meaningful fashion, or that thereby we can say that "there was an historical Jesus."

An Unresolved Question

As a final consideration, I might suggest that the situation between Mark and Q could be even more complex. Most scholars find some echo in Mark of Q ideas and experiences. But could the influence have extended in the other direction, too? Q surfaces for the first time in Matthew and Luke, likely after the turn of the second century. What recent revisions and additions might have been made to it? (It is thought the two evangelists used different "editions" of Q.) There is no necessity to assume they are resurrecting some document that had been dead or fixed for several decades. This line of approach may also help solve the one intriguing question where my view of Q is concerned.

Why should the invented Q founder, with no connection to the cults of Paul or the usual savior concepts, have been named Jesus—which has the meaning of "savior" and the echo of divinity?

Was the term so widespread among Jewish sectarian circles that it exercised a compelling attraction on the Kingdom-preaching community in Galilee? This would imply that the Q people, perhaps in the decade or so following the Jewish War, were by that time aware of the spiritual Christ cults flourishing in the wider world, and thus of the higher significance of the name. If so, did this impel that move toward divinity discernible in the final phase of Q3?

Or could, perhaps, the latest stage of Q postdate the earliest phase of Mark, and had there been crossover influences? As part of this question, we would then ask: had Q3 used the name "Jesus" at all?

Even if it nowhere appeared in the text, even if another designation had been used by the Q3 redactors in passages like the dialogue between Jesus and John, Matthew and Luke, under the influence of Mark and because they were not conscious of reproducing history, would have changed it to Jesus.

But there is another possibility. It is not improbable that some intervening hand, before the later Synoptics came to be written, had already altered Q3's original designation for its founder to fit a deepening trend: the near-universality of the name Jesus among a host of apocalyptic and salvation sects. Perhaps this had been done under the influence of a newly-minted Mark. Perhaps the altering hand was someone who saw the Q document as a surviving record, or a related account—historical or otherwise—of the humanized divine Christ of the Gospel of Mark.

A written Q, in fact, may finally have found its way to the Markan community and after minor alterations, rested for a time on the same shelf as the recently constructed Gospel. It was left to a later evangelist in a neighboring community to amalgamate the two after copies reached him by the same post, so to speak. Some years after that, another evangelist, this one a little further away perhaps, whose community had different, more gentile interests, got wind of the two documents, arranged for copies and did his own reworking.

The construction of an historical Jesus was well under way.

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Notes

¹ Since it contains an unmistakable allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem, and because it is not in keeping with what Paul elsewhere says about his fellow countrymen. See, for example, Birger Pearson: *1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation*, HTR 64 (1971), 79-94. [See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?: *The Jews "Who Killed the Lord Jesus"*.]

² For example, Origen, in his *Contra Celsum* discusses a few times (e.g., I, 46 and 67) the veracity of Jesus' miracles; if Josephus had referred to Jesus as a "doer of wonderful deeds" (as scholars like J. D. Crossan claim), he would hardly have passed up the opportunity to appeal to the Jewish historian's witness. Some claim that Origen's statement in *Contra Celsum* I, 47 that Josephus "did not believe in Jesus as the Christ" constitutes an oblique reference to such a passage, but this is better explained as Origen's reaction to the fact that Josephus declares, in *Jewish Wars* VI, 312-13, that the Jews' predictions about a Messiah really applied to the emperor Vespasian. [See Supplementary Article No. 10: Josephus Unbound.]

³ Origen uses a copy which has Josephus regarding the destruction of Jerusalem as a divine punishment for the murder of James, whereas no surviving copy of Josephus makes any such suggestion. [See the sections on the "lost reference" in Josephus Unbound.]

⁴ E.g., Origen, Barrett, Héring, Delling (TDNT I, 489), Schoeps, Salmond. See Paul Ellingworth, *A Translator's Handbook for 1 Corinthians*, p.46: "A majority of scholars think that supernatural powers are intended here." [See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?: *The Rulers of this Age*.]

⁵ J. D. Quinn in the Anchor Bible Commentaries (*Titus*, p.65) says that "the phrase *pro chronon aionion* refers to the timeless order in which God himself lives, in contrast to the *chronoi aionioi* (as in Romans 16:25) through which the world has passed in history. Cf. James Barr, *Biblical Words For Time*, p.138f.

⁶ The little document called *Discourse to the Greeks* and erroneously ascribed to Justin Martyr shows that the Logos could be looked upon as an agency of salvation. Here it takes on decidedly personal characteristics in that it "has ceaseless care over us," and "makes mortals become immortal, human beings gods" (5). See E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, p.300.

⁷ See under *Sarx* in TDNT VII, 128.

⁸ Helmut Koester's groundbreaking search for Synoptic references in the writings of the early Fathers, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern*, concludes that almost all such references come from a pre-Gospel layer of tradition.

⁹ If Papias' (now lost) *Oracles of the Lord Interpreted* had contained quotations from such Gospels, later commentators, like Eusebius and Philip of Side, would certainly have referred to them. Nor is it likely that if he had full narrative Gospels of Jesus' life Papias would have disparaged written works and preferred oral traditions, as he is reported to have said. Papias tells, in the fragments quoted by Eusebius, that his information about "Mark" came from "the Presbyter", but whether this was also the case concerning "Matthew" Eusebius is not clear, though it is likely. All Papias witnesses to (assuming we can trust Eusebius) is that a couple of decades or so into the second century, there were certain circulating collections of sayings and

possibly anecdotes, probably of a prophetic nature, one of them in Hebrew or Aramaic, which had begun to be attributed to an historical Jesus and associated with the names of early reputed followers of him.

¹⁰ *Midrash and Lection in Matthew, The Evangelist's Calendar, Luke: A New Paradigm* [See the book review of John Shelby Spong's *Liberating the Gospels*.]

¹¹ See *The Paraphrase of Shem* and *The Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC VII,1 and V,5)

¹² *Who Wrote the New Testament?* (1995) and *A Myth of Innocence* (1988) [See the book review of Burton Mack's *Who Wrote the New Testament?*]

¹³ For example, C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles in the New English Bible*, p.86f; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, p.146f; J. L. Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.100f.

¹⁴ *Jesus and the Word*, p.8

¹⁵ *What is Redaction Criticism?* p.23f

¹⁶ The 4th century "Ambrosiaster" gives us a clue in his commentary on Romans, that the Christians of Rome accepted faith in Christ "without seeing any of the apostles". In other words, it was a case of local development of belief in the widespread idea of a spiritual Son, and nothing to do with a missionary movement out of Judea.

¹⁷ Chapter Two, p. 31-45 [See the book review of Robert Funk's *Honest to Jesus*.]

¹⁸ *Who Wrote the New Testament?* p.75f; cf. his *A Myth of Innocence*, p.101f.

¹⁹ Galatians 1:16-2:1.

²⁰ Mack: *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, p. 80f; Funk: *Honest to Jesus*, p.43.

²¹ NEB translation; literally, all this is from God.

²² We have to keep in mind that it matters not whether such sayings were actually authentic. If Jesus was known to be a teacher, the competitive and disputatious nature of the movement itself would have led to attaching anything and everything to him for authority.

²³ Perhaps no attempt to explain this is as mind-boggling as that of Sophie Laws in her study *The Epistle of James* (p.34): "Whereas the Gospels have one form of adoption of Jesus' teaching, in that they identify it as his, James provides evidence of another way of retaining and preserving it: absorbed without differentiation into the general stock of ethical material." What are we to call this: "preservation by burial"?! James has covered over the traces so well one wonders how later generations were able to unearth it. Laws' bland statement that "It is not important to James to indicate where his precepts derive from Jesus," explains nothing and only highlights the sheer absurdity of the idea. Laws is in good company with such as Peter H. Davids (*James*, p.16), who boldly states: "The non-citation of Jesus even when dependent on his thought, is fully characteristic of the New Testament epistles." Davids draws on other silences to prove that the silence in James is not a silence at all!

²⁴ Verse 17's "of Christ" is an objective genitive, supported by the entire context. See C. K. Barrett's attempt (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p.189) to introduce a preaching Jesus alongside the apostolic preachers into a little relative pronoun in verse 14. *Hou ouk ekousan*, he says, should be translated as meaning "Christ must be heard either in his own person, or in the person of his preachers." Barrett's claim, which no one to my knowledge agrees with, destroys Paul's finely-created chain of argument. Barrett is letting what he cannot believe is missing override what is clearly there—or not there—in Paul's words.

²⁵ *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Hebrews*, p.500

²⁶ Hebrews 10:37 makes it clear that "the coming one" has not come previously, for scripture's promise has not yet been fulfilled. And 8:4 virtually spells out that Christ had never been on earth. (Ellingworth, op.cit., p.405, shies away from this conclusion by rejecting the normal interpretation of the imperfect verbs, since "it could be misunderstood as meaning that Jesus had never been to earth"!.) As for 9:28, which scholars are willing to say is the only spot in the New Testament epistles where the Parousia is spoken of as a *second* coming, the "*ek deuterou*" can instead be taken as meaning "next" in a sequential sense, and not necessarily "a second time"; in fact, the context of v.27-28 supports the former. [See Supplementary Article No. 9: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews.]

²⁷ Since the higher realm of spirit constituted the "true" reality, that upper world contained the spiritual counterparts of things material in the world below. Thus within the spirit realm Christ could take on the equivalent of "flesh", make a "blood" sacrifice, even be "of David's stock" as in Romans 1:3. Note that this feature of Christ "*kata sarka*" is determined by scripture, as Paul tells us in verse 2. It is on the prophets, not known historical fact, that Paul has founded his "gospel of the Son", and his activities in both "flesh" and "spirit". [See Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ as "Man".]

²⁸ It has been remarked (e.g., by E. P. Sanders in his *Jesus and Judaism*) that Jesus' teaching, especially that considered most probably authentic by modern scholarship, was hardly of a nature to prompt the authorities to execute him. Sanders, too, points out that such teaching did not have a Jewish focus, much less an apocalyptic one; neither did it call for the repentance or restoration of Israel. This fundamental incompatibility between the "teaching" side of the Gospel story and the "Passion" side is strong evidence that the one originally had nothing to do with the other, but were brought together artificially.

²⁹ As in John Kloppenborg's *The Formation of Q*.

³⁰ Burton Mack and John Dominic Crossan are prominently associated with this view of a "Cynic" Jesus.

³¹ There are those who claim that the Synoptic Gospels do not specifically state that Jesus is divine, though the picture painted of his "suffering, death and resurrection" certainly leans in a cultic direction.

³² Mack locates the Markan community in Sidon or Tyre; others in southern Syria. Willi Marxsen liked Galilee itself. Virtually every commentator regards the Q community as native to Galilee.

³³ See Eugene Boring, "The Paucity of Sayings in Mark," SBLSP 1977

Presenting the basic case for the non-existence of an historical Jesus and a different origin of Christianity.

**The Jesus Puzzle
Was There No Historical Jesus?
Earl Doherty**

Main Articles - Preamble

Did Jesus exist? Are the origins of Christianity best explained without a founder Jesus of Nazareth? Before the Gospels do we find an historical Jesus or a Jesus myth?

The five Main Articles following this Preamble present the basic case for the non-existence of an historical Jesus. Part One, "A Conspiracy of Silence," surveys the silence on the Gospel Jesus and Gospel events in the early epistolary record. Part Two, "Who Was Christ Jesus?" examines that early record for a more realistic picture of the original faith and the context of its period. Part Three, "The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth," presents the development of the Gospels (including Q) and their new Jesus figure as the founder of Christianity. The "Postscript" surveys the non-Christian record of the time and considers some general problems in current New Testament research. Finally, "The Second Century Apologists" examines the post-Gospel situation and the wider, non-canonical record of the second century. Discussions and arguments put forward in the Main Articles are developed in greater depth, with additional references and sources, in the Supplementary Articles (see Home Page), as well as in many Reader Feedback responses (see Reader Feedback Index).

Preamble

As we enter the 21st century, interest in the historical Jesus has been rising dramatically. In the media, in bestselling books, on the Internet, Jesus as an historical figure rather than an object of faith is being subjected to an unprecedented investigation and reinterpretation. The inquiry into Christian origins has entered the public eye like never before, and its radical new findings, together with the liberal trend to bring Jesus down to earth, has fascinated and disturbed believer and non-believer alike.

Perhaps for the first time in its history, the field of New Testament research is in disarray. The most progressive circle of scholarship within it, the group known as the Jesus Seminar, has recently come to the conclusion that Jesus' corpse, far from being resurrected from the dead, probably rotted in some unknown grave, and that the Christian movement did not begin out of a conviction that Jesus had risen bodily from his tomb. More conservative ranks are fiercely resisting such trends, and even popular publications like *Bible Review* have occasionally become battlegrounds for a civil war in which Christian scholars on both sides are attacking each other's competence and integrity and taking no prisoners.

But in the new search for the historical Jesus, the most important issue of all is being largely ignored. Has Western society been the victim of the greatest misconception in history? Could the reason why every generation is able to reinvent Jesus in its own image, why a multitude of scholars can come up with many radically different pictures of the founder of Christianity, be that there is no actual man to be uncovered, no historical figure to exercise control over the unending search? If the record is so mercurial, so open to interpretation, should not this possibility be at the very top of the agenda? The Jesus Seminar, at the beginning of its deliberations in the mid-1980s, claims to have addressed the question, but this amounted to little more than a show of hands. Had these scholars surveyed the Christian record from this point of view with as much enthusiasm and intensity as they devoted in several years of study to the authenticity of the sayings and deeds of Jesus, they might have come to acknowledge that the underpinnings of their work are astonishingly tenuous and to understand why the question of whether Jesus really existed refuses to go away.

The idea that Christianity may have begun without an historical Jesus was first floated near the end of the 18th century by certain philosophers of the French Revolution. In Germany a few decades later, D. F. Strauss and Bruno Bauer laid a groundwork for the theory by labeling much of the story of Jesus "mythology" and the Gospels "literary inventions." Bauer came to doubt the historicity of Jesus. But it was at the turn of the 20th century that detailed examination of the issue began in earnest. Since then a handful of reputable scholars in each generation have denied outright any historical existence for the Gospel Jesus: among them J. M. Robertson in Britain, Arthur Drews in Germany, Paul-Louis Couchoud and Prosper Alfaric in France, followed by several others. Most recently, G. A. Wells, Professor of German at the University of London (now retired), has published six books on the subject, a telling dissection of Christian literature, especially the Gospels, which reveals just how wispy and elusive is the historical basis that lies behind the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

My own research in this field goes back almost 20 years, when I first encountered a serious presentation of the theory in Professor Wells. Although my university training was not in New Testament studies, I have a degree in Ancient History and Classical Languages, giving me a working knowledge of Greek and Latin, which I have supplemented with the basics of Hebrew and Syriac. In addition to the New Testament, along with many parts of the Old, I have thoroughly investigated all the non-canonical Christian documents, the 2nd and 3rd century Apologists, all the relevant Jewish Pseudepigrapha of the era together with the Dead Sea scrolls,

plus much of Christian and non-Christian Gnosticism. To this I have added a study of Philo of Alexandria, Middle Platonism and other philosophies, relevant ancient historians, Hellenistic mystery cults and the general religious thought of the era.

My investigations have led me to a fundamental disagreement with Professor Wells. (He is the only prominent writer on the "Jesus-as-myth" theory in the past generation; earlier proponents are difficult for the average reader to come by, so I will not address them.) Wells postulates that Paul and other Christians of his day believed that "Jesus" had lived in obscurity at some unknown point in the past, perhaps two or three centuries before their time. The problem is, there seems to be no more evidence in the epistles that Paul has such a figure in mind than there is for his knowledge of a Jesus of Nazareth who had lived and died during the reign of Herod Antipas. Rather, everything in Paul points to a belief in an entirely divine Son who "lived" and acted in the spiritual realm, in the same mythical setting in which all the other savior deities of the day were seen to operate. No Greek or Roman believed that the god Mithras had lived in an identifiable period of earthly history, or that the bull he slaughtered was "historical," and the mystery myths at the time of Christian beginnings tended to be moved to a supernatural sphere under the influence of current philosophy. With this view, Christianity can be seen to fit nicely into its surrounding milieu, a child of its time. It also enables us to read and understand Paul in all his spiritual richness—from an historical interest point of view—and to gain a thorough picture of what his faith constituted. Once early Christian belief is seen in its proper light, a whole new window is gained onto the religious spirit of the era, since Christianity was the great synthesizer and preserver of that spirit. But if we insist instead on seeing early Christian faith as some strange hybrid anomaly against the background beliefs of its day, that picture will remain forever deficient.

Today we face two principal impediments to understanding Paul's belief in Christ as an entirely spiritual figure. One is the fact that it is based on views of the universe which are alien to our modern outlook. The second is our failure to grasp how the Jewish scriptures, as they were interpreted by certain circles in Paul's day, could confer features on the heavenly Christ which we perceive as "historical." I am referring to passages like Romans 1:3, that Christ was "of David's seed," or Galatians 4:4, that he was "born of woman," plus a smattering of references to things like Jesus' "flesh" or "blood." These matters I have been careful to address, and to provide an intelligible explanation for.

Part One, "A Conspiracy of Silence," takes a detailed look at the pervasive silence on the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth which we find in almost a hundred years of earliest Christian correspondence. Not once does Paul or any other first century epistle writer identify their divine Christ Jesus with the recent historical man known from the Gospels. Nor do they attribute the ethical teachings they put forward to such a man. Virtually every other detail in the picture of the Gospel Jesus is similarly missing. If Jesus was a "social reformer" whose teachings began the Christian movement, as today's liberal scholars now style him, how can such a Jesus be utterly lacking in all the New Testament epistles, while only a cosmic Christ is to be found?

This missing dimension in the early Christian record cannot be shrugged off, as New Testament scholarship has had a habit of doing. Timeworn "explanations" such as that the early church "had no interest" in the earthly life of Jesus, or that Paul's theology did not require it, are simply inadequate, if not in many respects fallacious. Scholars love to malign the so-called "argument from silence," but when the void is this pervasive and profound, the rationale for it had better be of sterling quality, and such a thing not even the most recent scholarship has provided. In this first article, I point out elements to that silence in the epistles which have been little if at all remarked on before.

Part Two, "Who Was Christ Jesus?", is the core of the series, for it attempts to set out the concept of the spiritual Christ who was the object of faith for Paul and much of the early Christian movement. This faith grew out of the prominent religious and philosophical ideas of the age, both Jewish and Greek, about an intermediary force between God and the world, a spiritual "Son"; it operated within views of the universe which have long since been abandoned. I also compare Paul's Christ with the savior deities of the current Graeco-Roman mystery cults, and although it is no longer fashionable to maintain that much of what is distinctively Christian was directly derived from the mysteries, both these religious expressions share elements of the same thought-world and are in part branches of the same tree. Seeing Christianity in this light goes a long way toward understanding some of Paul's thought. At the same time, Paul's words about Christ are examined to show that apostles like himself are offering a faith based on revelation from God, mostly through the interpretation of scripture, in an age of divine inspiration which had nothing to do with the recent career of an historical man. The second article finishes with a brief look at another conclusion: that Christianity, as shown by its great diversity in the early period, did not arise at a single time and place or out of a single missionary movement, but expressed itself in different forms in many sects and locations. I offer a definition of the terms "Jesus" and "Christ" as they were used during this initial period.

Part Three, "The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth," begins with a search for the Gospels. These documents, which scholars now admit are expressions of faith, not history, were written in stages and probably not as early as traditionally supposed. Ultimately they are all dependent for their picture of Jesus' life on a single source, the earliest version of Mark. Nor does any sign of them emerge in the wider Christian world until well into the second century. Next, I take a close look at the document known as "Q" in which the core of the historical Jesus as teacher, miracle-worker and apocalyptic prophet—something quite separate from the cultic Christ of Paul—was first created. I show how signs within that document and its evolution indicate that no historical figure lay at its roots. Those who now claim that the Christian movement began out of the teachings of a Jesus as represented in the Synoptic Gospels, are forced to base such a figure almost exclusively on that lost Q document, and what can be gleaned about its original nature and developmental stages. Claims of corroboration in the rediscovered Gospel of Thomas rest also on uncertain foundations. The article concludes with a survey of how Mark put the first Gospel together out of separate elements, its scriptural ingredients and sectarian features.

The original series (first published in shorter form in the magazine *Humanist in Canada* in 1995 and 1996) concluded with a "Postscript" to cover the non-Christian witness to Jesus, or lack thereof. (It is amazing how much energy on the question of Jesus' existence gets focused on this sideshow of Josephus, Tacitus and company—at best an inconclusive one—when the most telling material lies in the Christian documents themselves.) I then address what I call "Five Fallacies" contained in the traditional scholarly analysis of Christian origins and the early Christian record.

A little later, a fifth article in the series followed, this one looking at "The Second Century Apologists." In this lesser known area of Christian writing, we find a startling silence on the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth which extends to several authors, and even some telling material in Justin Martyr, who is the only major apologist before the year 180 to include an historical Gospel Jesus in his defence of Christianity to the pagans. I take a close look at the most fascinating of all the apologies, *Minucius Felix*, which in its treatment of the idea of a crucified man and his cross constitutes a true "smoking gun."

Another section of the web site is "Book Reviews." New publications on Jesus and Christian origins are appearing regularly, as scholars of different persuasions attempt to come to terms with the advances made in New Testament research and offer their own interpretations of how

Christianity began. Are their scenarios credible, and have they properly taken all the evidence into account? I offer my views on books like Burton Mack's *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, Robert Funk's *Honest to Jesus*, and John Shelby Spong's *Liberating the Gospels*. A separate review section surveys recent books which question the existence of an historical Jesus. Reviews of other books will follow at intervals.

After the Main Articles, I have added separate studies on a range of New Testament subjects, from problem documents to questions of interpretation and features of the early Christian movement. These "Supplementary Articles" supply a greater depth of argument and understanding to the mythicist position. Other site features include a "Quick Assembly" which summarizes in twelve easy points the essentials of the Jesus Puzzle theory, while putting together an actual puzzle picture; and a comprehensive look at all the "silences" to be found in the non-Gospel record, called "The Sound of Silence: 200 Missing References to the Gospel Jesus in the New Testament Epistles." I have also reprinted an original Jesus Puzzle article written for the *Journal of Higher Criticism* (Fall 1997 issue), edited by Darrell Doughty and Robert Price, both members of the Jesus Seminar. (Check the "What's New" link from the head of the Home Page for regular new features and additions.)

A "Reader Feedback" section posts comments, queries and my responses to them. Many of the latter constitute mini-articles in themselves on a variety of important topics within the mythicist theory. An Index to these responses, with direct links, appears at the beginning of the Feedback section.

I have also written a full-length contemporary novel which focuses on an investigation of the historical Jesus question, set against a background plot of today's struggle between secularism and fundamentalism. This novel is posted in its entirety on the site: see the final section of the Home Page.

I think what any "mythicist" would welcome from mainstream scholars is an energetic examination of the Jesus-as-myth theory and an honest attempt to deal with its arguments. The theory that there was no historical Jesus shows no sign of losing credence, and in a kind of "underground" fashion is even gaining support. It is time for a serious examination of why this is so.

Part One:

A Conspiracy Of Silence

Around the year 107, the Christian bishop of Antioch made a last, doleful journey. Under military escort Ignatius travelled by land from Antioch to Rome, where in its brutal arena he was to die a martyr's death. Along the way he wrote to several Christian communities.

To the Trallians he said: "Close your ears then if anyone preaches to you without speaking of Jesus Christ. Christ was of David's line. He was the son of Mary; he was really born, ate and drank, was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was really crucified....He was also truly raised from the dead."

But there is something very curious about the occurrence of such ideas in Ignatius' letters. Let's leave the Gospels aside for now, except to say that there is no good reason to date any of them before the late first century, and look at the remaining corpus of surviving Christian writings to Ignatius' time.

The above chart includes the genuine letters of Paul, written in the 50s; letters written later in the first century under his name: Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians; and the three Pastorals (1 & 2 Timothy & Titus) dated to the second century; other New Testament epistles: James, Hebrews, Jude, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John; and Revelation. Also included are non-canonical writings: 1 Clement, the Didache (later called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), the letters of Ignatius, and the Epistle of Barnabas. The dates of many of these documents, all originally written in Greek, are difficult to fix and are here only approximate.

Several times in his letters Ignatius stresses his belief in Jesus as the son of Mary, as a man who had lived at the time of Herod, who had suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. Every Christian would agree that these are essential elements of the Gospel story, along with the portrayal of Jesus as an ethical teacher, as a worker of miracles, an apocalyptic preacher of the coming Kingdom of God. And yet when we step outside those Gospels into the much more rarefied atmosphere of the first century epistles, we encounter a huge puzzle.

Before Ignatius, not a single reference to Pontius Pilate, Jesus' executioner, is to be found. Ignatius is also the first to mention Mary; Joseph, Jesus' father, nowhere appears. The earliest reference to Jesus as any kind of a teacher comes in 1 Clement, just before Ignatius, who himself seems curiously unaware of any of Jesus' teachings. To find the first indication of Jesus as a miracle worker, we must move beyond Ignatius to the Epistle of Barnabas. Other notable elements of the Gospel story are equally hard to find.

This strange silence on the Gospel Jesus which pervades almost a century of Christian correspondence cries out for explanation. It cannot be dismissed as some inconsequential quirk, or by the blithe observation made by New Testament scholarship that early Christian writers "show no interest" in the earthly life of Jesus. Something is going on here. In Part One, we are going to take a close look at this "Conspiracy of Silence" to which Paul and every other Christian writer of the first century seems to be a party.

Christianity was allegedly born within Judaism, whose basic theological tenet was: God is One. The ultimate blasphemy for a Jew would have been to associate any man with God. Yet what did those first Christians do? They seemingly took someone regarded as a crucified criminal and turned him into the Son of God and Savior of the world. They gave him titles and roles formerly reserved for God alone. They made him pre-existent: sharing divinity with God in heaven before

the world was made. Nor was this something that evolved over time. All this highly spiritual and mythological thinking is the very earliest expression we find about Jesus.

And yet there is a resounding silence in Paul and the other first century writers. We might call it "The Missing Equation." Nowhere does anyone state that this Son of God and Savior, this cosmic Christ they are all talking about, was the man Jesus of Nazareth, recently put to death in Judea. Nowhere is there any defense of this outlandish, blasphemous proposition, the first necessary element (presumably) in the Christian message: that a recent man was God.

Such a defense would have been required even for gentile listeners. The Greeks and Romans had their own religious philosophies (to be looked at in greater detail in Part Two), which included the idea of a divine Son, of an intermediary between God and the world, but such spiritual concepts had never been equated with a human being.

By contrast, look at the Acts of the Apostles, which a number of critical scholars (John Knox, J. T. Townsend, Burton Mack, J. C. O'Neill) judge was written well into the second century. (See Reader Feedback Set 17.) In chapter 2, Peter is represented as speaking to the Jews like this: "Men of Israel, hear my words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God..." And he goes on to preach about this Jesus, whom "God has made both Lord and Christ."

Here is the equation missing in the first century epistles. It starts with the human Jesus and declares him to have been divine or made divine. Paul and other early writers, however, seem to speak solely of a divine Christ. He is the starting point, a kind of given, and is never identified with a recent human being. Spiritual beliefs are stated about this divine Christ and Son of God. Paul believes *in* a Son of God, not that anyone *was* the Son of God.

1 Corinthians 8:6, for example, says: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all being comes; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came to be and we through him." In the same letter, Paul recites the gospel he preached (15:3-4): "That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures." Why would the equation of this divine Savior with the recent Jesus of Nazareth not be a necessary and natural part of at least some of the faith declarations or even simple arguments and discussions we find in all the first century epistles? It is notably missing in 1 Corinthians 1:18f, where Paul is defending God's wisdom and the apparent folly of Christian doctrine, yet he feels no necessity to include a defense of the folly that a human being has been elevated to divinity. I will leave the reader to peruse other passages, such as Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20, the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and so on, and to ask where is the recent Jesus of Nazareth in all this, the man who had supposedly walked the very earth which these writers too had trod, in many cases within their own lifetimes.

Consider another great silence: on the teachings of Jesus. The first century epistles regularly give moral maxims, sayings, admonitions, which in the Gospels are spoken by Jesus, without ever attributing them to him. The well-known "Love Your Neighbor," originally from Leviticus, is quoted in James, the Didache, and three times in Paul, yet none of them points out that Jesus had made this a centerpiece of his own teaching. Both Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:9) and the writer of 1 John even attribute such love commands to God, not Jesus!

When Hebrews talks of the "voice" of Christ today (1:2f, 2:11, 3:7, 10:5), why is it all from the Old Testament? When Paul, in Romans 8:26, says that "we do not know how we are to pray," does this mean he is unaware that Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer to his disciples? When the writer of 1 Peter urges, "do not repay wrong with wrong, but retaliate with blessing," has he forgotten Jesus' "turn the other cheek"? Romans 12 and 13 is a litany of Christian ethics, as is the

Epistle of James and parts of the "Two Ways" instruction in the Didache and Epistle of Barnabas; but though many of these precepts correspond to Jesus' Gospel teachings, not a single glance is made in his direction. Such examples could be multiplied by the dozen.

In passing, it must be noted that those "words of the Lord" which Paul puts forward as guides to certain practices in his Christian communities (1 Corinthians 7:10 and 9:14) are not from any record of earthly pronouncements by Jesus. It is a recognized feature of the early Christian movement that charismatic preachers like Paul believed themselves to be in direct communication with the spiritual Christ in heaven, receiving from him instruction and inspiration. (See R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p.127; Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, p.87, n.7; Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, p.206.)

Christianity and certain Jewish sects believed that the end of the world and the establishment of God's Kingdom was at hand. Paul tells his readers: "the time we live in will not last long," and "you know the Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night." But can Paul be truly unaware that Jesus himself had made almost identical apocalyptic predictions, as recorded in passages like Mark 13:30 and Matthew 24:42? He shows no sign of it. He and others seem similarly ignorant of Jesus' stance in regard to the cleanness of foods, on the question of keeping the whole of the Jewish Law, on the issue of preaching to the gentiles, even in situations where they are engaged in bitter debate over such issues.

Nor is there any reference in the epistles to Jesus as the Son of Man, despite the fact that the Gospels are full of this favorite self-designation of Jesus. This apocalyptic figure, taken from the Book of Daniel (7:13), appears in a cluster of Christian and Jewish sectarian documents in the latter first century, including the Gospels, where Jesus declares himself to be the one who will arrive at the End-time on the clouds of heaven to judge the world and establish the Kingdom. It seems inconceivable that Paul, with all his preoccupation about the imminent End (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, for example) would either be unaware of Jesus' declared role as the Son of Man, or choose to ignore it.

But the silence extends beyond individual pronouncements to Jesus' ministry as a whole, and it is nowhere more startling than in Romans 10. Paul is anxious to show that the Jews have no excuse for failing to believe in Christ and gaining salvation, for they have heard the good news about him from appointed messengers like Paul himself. And he contrasts the unresponsive Jews with the gentiles who welcomed it. But surely Paul has left out the glaringly obvious. For the Jews—or at least some of them—had supposedly rejected that message from the very lips of Jesus himself, whereas the gentiles had believed second-hand. In verse 18 Paul asks dramatically: "But can it be they never heard it (i.e., the message)?" How could he fail to highlight his countrymen's spurning of Jesus' very own person? Yet all he refers to are apostles like himself who have "preached to the ends of the earth."

Then in Romans 11, Paul goes on to compound this silence by describing the extent of Israel's rejection, wherein he quotes Elijah's words from 1 Kings about the Jews' alleged habit (a largely unfounded myth) of killing their own prophets. Yet Paul fails to add to this record the culminating atrocity of the killing of the Son of God himself. (For 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, see Part Two.)

This is a recurring feature of Paul's letters: he totally ignores Jesus' recent career and places the focus of revelation and salvation entirely upon the missionary movement of which he is the prominent member (as he sees it). The pseudo-Pauline letters do this, too.

Read passages like Romans 16:25-27, Colossians 1:25-27, Ephesians 3:5-10 and ask yourself where is Jesus' role in disclosing God's long-hidden secret and plan for salvation? Why, in 2 Corinthians 5:18, is it Paul who has been given the ministry of reconciliation between man and God, and not Jesus in his ministry? (The cryptic and ubiquitous little phrase "in / through Christ" which Paul often inserts in passages like this hardly encompasses such a meaning, and I will be talking about what it does mean in Part Two.)

Paul's view of the present period leading up to the end of the world seems to take no account of the recent activity of Jesus on earth. He gives us no "interregnum," no period between Christ's death and resurrection, and his future Coming. Passages in Romans 8 (18-25) and 13 (11-12), and especially 2 Corinthians 6:2 ("Now [referring to his own work] has the day of deliverance dawned"), envision no impingement of Jesus' recent career on the progression from the old age to the new; rather, it is Paul's own present activity which is an integral part of this process. Nor does he ever address the question which would have reflected popular expectation: Why did the actual coming of the Messiah not in itself produce the arrival of the Kingdom? In the epistles, Christ's anticipated Coming at the End-time is never spoken of as a "return" or second Coming; the impression conveyed is that this will be his first appearance in person on earth. (For Hebrews 9:28, see Epilogue of Supplementary Article No. 9: A Sacrifice in Heaven.)

No first century epistle mentions that Jesus performed miracles. In some cases the silence is striking. Both Colossians and Ephesians view Jesus as the Savior whose death has rescued mankind from the demonic powers who were believed to pervade the world, causing sin, disease and misfortune. But not even in these letters is there any mention of the healing miracles that the Gospels are full of, those exorcisms which would have shown that Jesus had conquered such demons even while he was on earth.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is anxious to convince his readers that humans can be resurrected from the dead. Why then does he not point to any traditions that Jesus himself had raised several people from the dead? Where is Lazarus?

In several letters Paul deals with accusations by certain unnamed rivals that he is not a legitimate apostle. Even Peter and James dispute his authority to do certain things. Can we believe that in such situations no one would ever have used the argument that Paul had not been an actual follower of Jesus, whereas others had? Paul never discusses the point. In fact, he claims (1 Cor. 9:1 and 15:8) that he has "seen" the Lord, just as Peter and everyone else have. This is an obvious reference to visions, one of the standard modes of religious revelation in this period. And as Paul's "seeing" of the Lord is acknowledged to have been a visionary one, his comparison of himself with the other apostles suggests that their contact with Jesus was of the same nature: through visions.

And how could Paul, in Galatians 2:6, dismiss with such disdain those who had been the very followers of Jesus himself on earth? But in granting them no special status he is not alone. The word "disciple(s)" does not appear in the epistles, and concept of "apostle" in early Christian writings is a broad one, meaning simply a preacher of the message (i.e., the "gospel") about the Christ. It never applies to a select group of Twelve who supposedly possessed special authority arising from their apostleship to Jesus while he was on earth. (It is far from clear what "the Twelve" in 1 Corinthians 15:5 refers to, since Paul lists Peter and "the apostles" separately. The term appears nowhere else in the epistles.)

Nor is there any concept of apostolic tradition in the first century writers, no idea of teachings or authority passed on in a chain going back to the original Apostles and Jesus himself. Instead, everything is from the Spirit, meaning direct revelation from God, with each group claiming that

the Spirit they have received is the genuine one and reflects the true gospel. This is the basis of Paul's claim against his rivals in 2 Corinthians 11:4. The writer of 1 John, in his declaration (4:1f) that the Son of God has come in the flesh, draws on no apostolic tradition, on no historical record, but must claim validity for his own Spirit, as opposed to the Satan-inspired false spirit of the dissidents. In chapter 5, he declares that it is God's testimony through the Spirit which produces faith in the Son, not several decades of Christian preaching going back to Jesus himself. How could this writer in the community of John, which later produced the Fourth Gospel, say (5:11) that it is God who has revealed eternal life, and ignore all those memorable sayings of Jesus like "I am the resurrection and the life" which that Gospel so richly records?

As for Jesus' great appointment of Peter as the "rock" upon which his church is to be built, no one in the first century (including the writers of 1 and 2 Peter) ever quotes it or uses it in the frequent debates over authority.

The agency of all recent activity seems to be God, not Jesus. Paul speaks of "the gospel of God," "God's message". It is God appealing and calling to the Christian believer. 2 Corinthians 5:18 tells us that "from first to last this has been the work of God" (New English Bible translation). In Romans 1:19 the void is startling. Paul declares: "All that may be known of God by men...God himself has disclosed to them." Did Jesus not disclose God, were God's attributes not visible in Jesus? How could any Christian—as so many do—express himself in this fashion?

A few secondary omissions also deserve mention. No first century epistle, even when discussing Christian baptism, ever mentions either Jesus' own baptism or the figure of John the Baptist. Paul has much to say about the meaning of baptism (as in Romans 1:1-6), but he never compares its elements with Jesus' own experience by the Jordan. 1 Clement 17:1 speaks of those who heralded the Messiah's coming, but includes only Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel. The arch-betrayer Judas never appears, not even in a passage like Hebrews 12:15 where the author, in cautioning against the poisonous member in the community's midst, offers the figure of Esau as an example, who "sold his inheritance for a single meal." Surely selling the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver would have been a far more dramatic comparison!

Hebrews also contains (9:20f) a stunning silence on Jesus' establishment of the Christian Eucharist. The writer is comparing the old covenant with the new, but not even the quoted words of Moses at the former's inauguration: "this is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you," can entice him to mention that Jesus had established the new covenant at a Last Supper, using almost identical words, as Mark 14:24 and parallels record. He goes further in chapter 13 when he adamantly declares that Christians do not eat a sacrificial meal. The Didache 9 presents a eucharist which is solely a thanksgiving meal to God, with no sacramental significance and no establishment by Jesus.

This leaves us with 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul's declaration about Jesus' words at what he calls the Lord's Supper. I will address this in Part Two, as well as a few spots in various epistles which seem to come ambiguously close to referring to a life for Christ.

I have done little more than scratch the surface of this "Conspiracy of Silence" found in the first century epistles. But I'd like to conclude by looking at one glaring omission which no one, to my knowledge, has yet remarked on.

Where are the holy places?

In all the Christian writers of the first century, in all the devotion they display about Christ and the new faith, not one of them expresses the slightest desire to see the birthplace of Jesus, to visit

Nazareth his home town, the sites of his preaching, the upper room where he held his Last Supper, the tomb: where he was buried and rose from the dead. These places are never mentioned. Most of all, there is not a hint of pilgrimage to Calvary itself, where humanity's salvation was consummated. How could such a place not have been turned into a shrine?

Even Paul, this man so emotional, so full of insecurities, who declares (Philippians 3:10) that "all I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings," even he seems immune to the lure of such places. Three years were to pass following his conversion before he made even a short visit to Jerusalem. And this—so he tells us in Galatians—was merely to "get to know" Peter; he was not to return there for another 14 years.

Is it conceivable that Paul would not have wanted to run to the hill of Calvary, to prostrate himself on the sacred ground that bore the blood of his slain Lord? Surely he would have shared such an intense emotional experience with his readers. Would he not have been drawn to the Gethsemane garden, where Jesus was reported to have passed through the horror and the self-doubts that Paul himself had known? Would he not have gloried in standing before the empty tomb, the guarantee of his own resurrection? Is there indeed, in this wide land so recently filled with the presence of the Son of God, any holy place at all, any spot of ground where that presence still lingers, hallowed by the step, touch or word of Jesus of Nazareth? Neither Paul nor any other first century letter writer breathes a whisper of any such thing.

Nor do they breathe a word about relics associated with Jesus. Where are his clothes, the things he used in everyday life, the things he touched? Can we believe that items associated with him in his life on earth would not have been preserved, valued, clamored for among believers, just as things like this were produced and prized all through the Middle Ages? Why is it only in the fourth century that pieces of the "true cross" begin to surface?

New Testament scholars are quick to maintain that the "argument from silence" is an invalid one, but it surely becomes powerful when the silence is so pervasive, so perplexing. Why would writer after writer fail consistently to mention the very man who was the founder of their faith, the teacher of their ethics, the incarnation of the divine Christ they worshiped and looked to for salvation? Why would every Christian writer, in the highly polemical atmosphere during those early decades of the spread of the faith, fail to avail himself of the support for his position offered by the very words and deeds of the Son of God himself while he was on earth? What could possibly explain this puzzling, maddening, universal silence?

That question I will try to answer in Part Two: "Who Was Christ Jesus?"

Part Two:

Who Was Christ Jesus?

In Part One, I probed the mysterious silence about Jesus of Nazareth which lies at the heart of earliest Christianity. Neither his miracles nor his apocalyptic preaching, not the places or details of his birth, ministry or death, not his parents, his prosecutor, his herald, his betrayer, are ever mentioned by the first century Christian letter writers, and the ethical teachings which resemble his as recorded in the Gospels are never attributed to him. I called it, ironically, "A Conspiracy of Silence."

But if these silences mean anything (and it is impossible to accept the common scholarly rationalization that they reflect a universal "lack of interest" in the earthly life of Jesus by the first three generations of the Christian movement), then they ought to present their own integral picture. Can we derive from them a coherent, uniform concept of what earliest Christianity really was and what it believed in? Who was Paul's "Christ Jesus" if he was not the Jesus of Nazareth of the later Gospels?

First, we must understand the era to understand its ideas. After Alexander the Great conquered half the known earth in the late 4th century BCE, Greek language and culture (called Hellenism) inundated the whole eastern Mediterranean world; even the Jews, who always resisted assimilation, were not immune to its influence. Alexander's empire soon fragmented into warring mini-empires and eventually Rome rolled east and imposed its own absolute rule.

It was a troubled, often pessimistic time. Stoics, Epicureans, Platonists and others offered new moral and intellectual ways of coping with life and the unpredictable world. Understanding the ultimate Deity and establishing personal ethics were central concerns of all these movements. Wandering philosophers became a kind of popular clergy, frequenting the marketplace and people's homes. Healing gods, Oriental mysticism, a whole paraphernalia of magic and astrology were added to the pot to cope with another dimension to the world's distress: the vast panoply of unseen spirits and demons and forces of fate which were now believed to pervade the very atmosphere men and women moved in, harassing and crippling their lives. The buzzword was personal "salvation." And for the growing number who believed it could not be achieved in the world, it became salvation *from* the world. Redeeming the individual grew into a Hellenistic industry.

Many looked upon the Jews as providing a high moral and monotheistic standard, and gentiles flocked to Judaism in varying degrees of conversion. But even here there were strong currents of pessimism. For centuries the Jews as a nation had looked for salvation from a long succession of conquerors, until many had become convinced that only violent divine intervention would bring about the establishment of God's Kingdom and their own destined elevation to dominion over the nations of the earth. Such views were held by a mosaic of sectarian groups, each regarding itself as an elect, which flourished on the fringes of "mainstream" Judaism (Temple and Pharisees). Christianity in its early manifestations belonged to this melange of sects, comprised of a mix of gentiles and Jews, driven by an intense apocalyptic expectation of the coming end or transformation of the world.

Among both Jew and pagan there was a slide away from rationalism and a turning to personal revelation as the only source for knowledge about God and the ways to salvation. Mysticism, visionary inspiration, marvellous spiritual practices, became the seedbed of new faiths and sects. And no one possessed a richer hothouse for all this than the Jews, in their unparalleled collection

of sacred writings, from whose pages could be lifted newly-perceived truths about God and ultimate realities.

Onto such a stage in the middle decades of the first century, into what one scholar has called "a seething mass of sects and salvation cults" (John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p.396) stepped the apostles of a new movement. In Galatians 1:16 Paul says: "God chose to reveal his Son in me, and through me to preach him to the gentiles." Paul claims he is the instrument of God's revelation. He preaches the Son, the newly-disclosed means of salvation offered to Jew and gentile alike. But is this Son a recent historical man? Has he been revealed to the world through his own life and ministry? No, for as we saw in Part One, neither Paul nor any other early Christian letter writer presents us with such an idea.

Rather, the Son is a spiritual concept, just as God himself is, and every other deity of the day. None of them are founded on historical figures. The existence of this divine Son has hitherto been unknown; he has been a secret, a "mystery" hidden with God in heaven (e.g., Romans 16:25-27, Colossians 2:2). Information about this Son has been imbedded in scripture. Only in this final age has God himself (through his Spirit) inspired apostles like Paul to learn—from scripture and visionary experiences—about his Son and what he had done for humanity's salvation. And this Son was soon to arrive from heaven, at the imminent end of the present world.

If we remove Gospel associations from our minds, we find that this is exactly what Paul and the others are telling us. God is revealing Christ (as in the Galatians quote above), apostles inspired by God's Spirit are preaching him, believers are responding through faith. Ephesians 3:4-5 shows us the main elements of the new drama. "The mystery about Christ, which in former generations was not revealed to men [not even by Jesus himself, apparently], is now disclosed to dedicated apostles and prophets through the Spirit [by divine revelation]." God's Spirit, the divine power which inspires men like Paul, is the engine of the new revelation. All knowledge comes through this Spirit, with no suggestion that anything has been received from an historical Jesus and his ministry. (Part One dealt with Paul's few "words of the Lord", perceived communications from the spiritual Christ in heaven.)

The words of the first century writers never speak of Jesus' arrival or life on earth. Rather, they speak of his revelation, of his manifestation by God. 1 Peter 1:20 says: "Predestined from the foundation of the world, (Christ) was manifested for your sake in these last times." Here the writer uses the Greek word "*phaneroo*", meaning to manifest or reveal. Romans 3:25 says: "God set him forth (Christ Jesus) as a means of atonement by his blood, effective through faith." Here Paul uses a verb which, in this context, means "to declare publicly," reveal to public light. God is revealing Christ and the atonement he has made available to those who believe. Other passages, like Romans 16:25-27, Colossians 1:26 and 2:2, Titus 1:2-3, contain similar statements about the current unveiling of long-hidden divine secrets, and the careful eye that reads them can see that no room has been made for any recent life and work of Jesus.

It is God and scripture which Paul regards as the source of his inspiration and knowledge. Look at Romans 1:1-4. Paul has been called into the service of preaching the gospel. And note how this gospel is described. First it was announced beforehand in scripture by God's prophets. It is the gospel, Paul's message about the Christ, that has been announced in scripture, not Christ's life itself. Second, that gospel is not any that Jesus preached; rather, it is God's gospel, and it is about his Son. Again, all this is the language of revelation. Data like that in verses 3 and 4 of Romans 1 (to be addressed later) are part of what is being revealed, and this information has been found in scripture, which God's Spirit has inspired men like Paul to read in a new, "correct" way. Compare 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, which points squarely to scripture as the source of Paul's

doctrines about the Christ. (The phrase "according to the scriptures," while traditionally interpreted as meaning 'in fulfillment of the scriptures,' can instead entail the meaning of 'as the scriptures tell us' or 'as we learn from the scriptures'.)

Paul and other Christian preachers are offering salvation, but it is through a Christ who is a spiritual channel to God and one who has performed a redemptive act (the "atonement by his blood") in a mythical setting. We will look at both the medium and the act in a moment, but that act is not part of what has happened in the present time. Rather, the present is when the benefits available from this act are being revealed and applied: the forgiveness of sin and the guarantee of resurrection, "effective through faith" in the gospel. All this is the universal manner of expression in first century Christian epistles, and even beyond; one that ignores any recent career of Jesus and focuses all attention on those appointed to carry God's newly-disclosed message.

* * * *

At the core of that message lies the Son. Christianity was in the process of creating for the Western world the ultimate, lasting reflection of the central religious concept of the Hellenistic age. This we must now consider.

Monotheism was the possession not only of the Jews, but of much of Greek philosophy. Ancient thinking had arrived at an ultimate high God who had created and governed the universe. But a problem had to be faced. As such a God was made ever more lofty, more perfect, he also became more transcendent. Any form of contact with the inferior world of matter was deemed inappropriate and indeed impossible, and so the idea arose that any relationship between God and the world had to take place through some form of intermediary.

The Greek solution was the Logos, a kind of subsidiary god or divine force, an emanation of the Deity. In the most influential school of thinking, Platonism, the Logos was the image of God in perceivable form and a model for creation. He revealed the otherwise inaccessible, ultimate God, and through him—or it, since the Logos was more an abstract than a personal being—God acted upon the world. We know of Hellenistic religious sects based on the Logos. (See the little *Address to the Greeks*, originally attributed to Justin Martyr.)

The Jewish God never became quite so inaccessible, but knowledge of him and of his Law was thought to have been brought to the world by a part of himself called "Wisdom." This figure (it was a 'she') evolved almost into a divine being herself, an agent of creation and salvation with her own myths about coming to earth—though not in any physical incarnation. (See Proverbs 1 and 8-9, Baruch 3-4, Ecclesiasticus 24 and The Wisdom of Solomon.) In fact, many parts of the ancient world seem to have developed the concept of an intermediary divine figure coming to earth to bring knowledge and salvation, but details of such myths, especially for pre-Christian periods, are sketchy and much debated.

Out of this rich soil of ideas arose Christianity, a product of both Jewish and Greek philosophy. Its concept of Jesus the "Son" grew out of ideas like personified Wisdom (with a sex change), leavened with the Greek Logos, and amalgamated with the more personal and human figure of traditional Messiah expectation. Christianity made its Christ (the Greek word for Messiah) into a heavenly figure who could be related to, though he is intimately tied to God himself. Unlike Wisdom or the Logos, however, the Christian Savior was envisioned to have undergone self-sacrifice.

We can now gain a clearer understanding of Paul's Christ Jesus and the sphere of his activity. The pseudo-Pauline 2 Timothy tells us (1:9) that God (!) has saved us through his grace, "which was given to us in Christ Jesus in eternal times."

There are two key phrases here. First, the term "in Christ" (or sometimes "through Christ") which Paul and others use over a hundred times throughout the epistles: it can hardly bear on its slender back the sweeping meaning some scholars try to give it, namely as a kind of compact reference to Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. Check its use in other passages, like Ephesians 1:4, 2 Corinthians 3:14, and especially Titus 3:6: "(God) sent down the Spirit upon us plentifully through Jesus Christ our Savior."

Such references do not speak of the recent physical presence of Jesus of Nazareth on earth. Instead, Christ—the divine, heavenly Son—is now present on earth, in a mystical sense, embodied in the new faith movement and interacting with his believers. Like Wisdom and the Logos, he is the spiritual medium ("in" or "through Christ") through which God is revealing himself and doing his work in the world. "In Christ" can also refer to the mystical union which Paul envisions between the believer and Christ, as in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

But where and when had this intermediary Son performed the redeeming act itself?

Christ's self-sacrificing death was located "in times eternal," or "before the beginning of time" (*pro chronon aionion*). This is the second key phrase in 2 Timothy 1:9 and elsewhere. What is presently being revealed is something that had already taken place outside the normal realm of time and space. This could be envisioned as either in the primordial time of myth, or, as current Platonic philosophy would have put it, in the higher eternal world of ideas, of which this earthly world, with its ever-changing matter and evolving time, is only a transient, imperfect copy (more on this later). The benefits of Christ's redemptive act lay in the present, through God's revelation of it in the new missionary movement, but the act itself had taken place in a higher world of divine realities, in a timeless order, not on earth or in history. It had all happened in the sphere of God, it was all part of his "mystery." The blood sacrifice, even seeming biographical details like Romans 1:3-4, belong in this dimension.

* * * *

Such ideas are, to us, strange and even alien, but they were an integral part of the mythological thinking of the ancient world. To obtain a better insight into them, we will draw a comparison between Christianity and another prominent religious expression of the Graeco-Roman world of its time. It will also help us to understand the evolution of the idea of Christ's sacrificial redemption (though this will not be fully answered until Part Three.)

By the first century CE the Empire had several popular salvation cults known as the "mysteries," each with its own savior god or goddess, such as Osiris, Attis and Mithras. There has been a seesaw debate over when these cults became fully formed and how much they may have influenced Christian ideas, but the root versions of the Greek mysteries go back to those of Eleusis (near Athens) and of the Greek god Dionysos, in the first half of the first millennium BCE. At the very least we can say that Christianity in many of its aspects was a Jewish-oriented expression of this widespread religious phenomenon.

Each of these savior gods had in some way overcome death, or performed some act whose effects guaranteed for the initiate a happy afterlife. Christianity's savior god, Christ Jesus, had undergone death and been resurrected as a redeeming act (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), giving promises of resurrection and eternal life to the believer. This guarantee involved another feature of ancient world thinking, closely related to Platonism: the idea that things and events on earth had their parallels in heaven; this included divine figures who served as paradigms for earthly human counterparts. What the former underwent in the spiritual realm reflected the experiences and determined the destinies of those who were linked to them on earth. For example, the original "one like a son of man" in Daniel's vision (7:13-14) received power and dominion over the earth

from God, and this guaranteed that his human counterpart, the saints or elect of Israel, were destined to receive these things when God's Kingdom was established on earth. Christianity's Son, too, was a paradigm: Christ's experiences of suffering and death mirrored those of humans, but his exaltation would similarly be paralleled by their own exaltation. As Romans 6:5 declares: "We shall be united with Christ in a resurrection like his."

Savior gods also conferred certain benefits in the present world. They provided protection from the demon spirits and fates; Christ's devotees, too, claimed this for him (see Colossians and Ephesians). Rites of initiation in the mysteries, which included types of baptism, conferred rebirth and brought the initiate into a special relationship with the god or goddess. In Paul's baptism, the convert died to his present life and rose to a new one; of this new state, Paul says: "We are in Christ and Christ is in us."

Some of the savior gods had instituted sacraments: Mithras, after slaying the bull as a salvific blood sacrifice, had dined with the sun god, and this supper became the Mithraic cultic meal, similar to elements of the Christian Eucharist. Here, then, is the meaning of 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Paul is not referring to any historical Last Supper, but rather to the origin myth attached to the Christian sacred meal (at least in Paul's circle). The words are probably Paul's personal version of things, since he clearly identifies it as revealed knowledge, "from the Lord," not passed-on tradition through apostolic channels. The spiritual Christ himself, in a mythical time and place (including "at night"), had established this Supper and spoken the words about his body and blood that gave the meal its present meaning. The frequent translation "arrested" or "betrayed" in verse 23 is governed by the later Gospel story. The literal meaning of the Greek word is "to hand over" or "deliver up," a term commonly used in the context of martyrdom; it has no trouble fitting the context of myth. It can hardly mean "betrayed" in Romans 8:32 where God is the agent, or in Ephesians 5:2 where Jesus surrenders himself.

All this is not to say that there could be no differences between the ideas and rituals of the mysteries and those of Christianity, if only because they arose from different cultural milieus. The Greeks, for example, had no desire to be resurrected in the flesh; they generally found the idea repugnant, and salvation after death was a question of the pure soul freeing itself from the impurity of matter and rejoining the divine in the eternal world. There was no need for their gods to be resurrected in the same way Jesus was. However, it should be noted that earliest Christianity conceived of Jesus only as raised in the spirit, exalted to heaven immediately after death (eg, Philippians 2:9, 1 Peter 3:18, Hebrews 10:12, etc.). A bodily sojourn on earth with the Apostles came only with the Gospels. Indeed, the whole Easter event as the Gospels portray it is missing from the first century epistles.

But how could all this redeeming activity by savior gods, in both the mysteries and Christianity, be thought of as taking place "in the world," or even "in flesh," yet not at a specific historical time and location? This, of course, is the nature of myth, but it depends on certain views of the world held by the ancients.

One of these saw no rigid distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The two blended into one another. The earth was but one layer of a tiered system that progressed from base matter where humans lived to the purely spirit level where God dwelled. The spheres between the two contained other parts of the "world," populated by classes of angels, spirits and demons. This view was especially prevalent in Jewish apocalyptic thought, which saw various figures and activities involved in the coming end of the world as located in these layers above the earth.

Nor did time function the same way at all levels. In the 4th century the Roman philosopher Sallustius put his view this way: "All of this did not happen at any one time, but always is so...the story of Attis represents an eternal cosmic process, not an isolated event of the past."

Here we have crossed over into a somewhat different line of thinking from the continuous layered universe just described. The way Sallustius put things is essentially Platonic: what is perceived by contemplation and revelation on earth is only an imperfect reflection of eternal truths and spiritual processes in the upper world of ultimate reality. Various early Christian writers show different blendings of the Platonic and layered universes, and all of it was constructed over the ancient foundation of a more primitive myth-making view, one found around the world. This view placed divine figures and processes in a dim, primordial past: here the gods had planned and established things which gave meaning to present-day beliefs and practices, and from this "sacred past" humans drew benefits and even redemption. All these ideas contributed to the myths of the era in which Christianity was born.

For the average pagan and Jew, the bulk of the workings of the universe went on in the vast unseen spiritual realm (the "genuine" part of the universe) which began at the lowest level of the "air" and extended ever upward through the various layers of heaven. Here a savior god like Mithras could slay a bull, Attis could be castrated, and Christ could be hung on a tree by "the god of that world," meaning Satan (see the Ascension of Isaiah 9:14). The plainest interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews 9:11-14 is that Christ's sacrifice took place in a non-earthly setting and a spiritual time; 8:4 virtually tells us that he had never been on earth. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:44-49 and elsewhere can speak of Christ as "man" (*anthropos*), but he is the ideal, heavenly man (a widespread type of idea in the ancient world, including Philo: see Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ as "Man"), whose spiritual "body" provides the prototype for the heavenly body Christians will receive at their resurrection. For minds like Paul's, such higher world counterparts had as real an existence as the flesh and blood human beings around them on earth.

It is in much the same sense that Paul, in Romans 1 and Galatians 4, declares Christ to have been "of David's stock," born under the Law. The source of such statements is scripture, not historical tradition. The sacred writings were seen as providing a picture of the spiritual world, the realities in heaven. Since the spiritual Christ was now identified with the Messiah, all scriptural passages presumed to be about the Messiah had to be applied to him, even if understood in a mythical or Platonic sense. Several references predicted that the Messiah would be descended from David: thus Romans 1:3 (and elsewhere). Note that 1:2 points unequivocally to scripture as the source of this doctrine. (As does 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 for the source of Jesus' death and resurrection.) Isaiah 7:14, to give another example, supposedly spoke of the Messiah as born of a young woman, and so Paul in Galatians 4:4 tells us that Christ was "born of woman". (Note that he never gives the name of Mary, or anything about this "woman." Nor does he identify the time or place of this "birth".) The mysteries may not have had the same range of sacred writings to supply their own details, but the savior god myths contained equally human-like elements which were understood entirely in a mythical setting. Dionysos too had been born in a cave of a woman.

"Born of woman" is a lot like another phrase used almost universally of the activities of Christ: "in flesh" (*en sarki, kata sarka*). It may actually mean little more than "in the sphere of the flesh" or "in relation to the flesh." In his divine form and habitat a god could not suffer, and so he had to take on some semblance to humanity (eg, Philippians 2:8, Romans 8:3); his saving act had to be a "blood" sacrifice (e.g., Hebrews 9:22) because the ancient world saw this as the basic means of communion between man and Deity; and it all had to be done within humanity's territory. But the latter could still be within those lower spiritual dimensions above the earth which acted upon the material world. And in fact this is precisely what Paul reveals. In 1 Corinthians 2:8 he tells us

who crucified Jesus. Is it Pilate, the Romans, the Jews? No, it is "the rulers of this age (who) crucified the Lord of glory." Many scholars agree that he is referring not to temporal rulers but to the spirit and demonic forces—"powers and authorities" was the standard term— which inhabited the lower celestial spheres, part of the territory of "flesh." (See Paul Ellingworth, *A Translator's Handbook for 1 Corinthians*, p.46: "A majority of scholars think that supernatural powers are intended here." These include S. G. F. Brandon, C. K. Barrett, Jean Hering, Paula Fredriksen, S. D. F. Salmond, and it also included Ignatius and Marcion.) Colossians 2:15 can hardly refer to any historical event on Calvary.

It was in such spiritual, mythological dimensions that Paul's Christ Jesus had been 'taken on a body' (cf. Hebrews 10:5) and performed his act of redemption. Such was the timeless secret which God had hidden for long ages and only recently revealed to visionaries like Paul. And it was all to be discovered in scripture, or at least in the new way of reading it. It is very difficult for us to get our minds around this kind of "mythical thinking," because in our scientific and literal age we simply have no equivalent. This is perhaps the major stumbling block to an understanding and acceptance of the Jesus-as-myth theory. (For a comprehensive discussion of this area, including a detailed examination of passages like Romans 1:1-4 and Galatians 4:4-6, see Supplementary Article No. 8, Christ as "Man".)

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There are a few passages in the epistles which seem to speak of a recent coming of Christ, as in Galatians 3 and 4. But in 3:23 and 25 Paul stresses it is "faith" that has arrived in the present, while verse 24, despite a common misleading translation (as in the NEB), is literally "leading us to Christ," which can mean to faith in him. In 3:19, it is the gentiles who belong to Christ (verse 29) that are in mind. In any event, references to the sending or coming of Christ should be taken in the sense of the present-day revelation of Christ by God. (In the case of Galatians 4:4-6, verse 6 specifies that it is the "spirit" of the Son that has been sent into the hearts of believers.) Early Christians saw the spiritual Christ as having arrived in a real way, active in the world and speaking through themselves. This is certainly the sense of passages like 1 John 5:20, "We know that the Son of God is come," and Hebrews 9:11 and 26.

And probably Ephesians 2:17, which is especially interesting: "And coming, he (Christ) announced the good news..." But what was the content of that news? Instead of taking the opportunity to refer to some of Jesus' Gospel teachings, the writer quotes Isaiah. All the first century documents, as well as some later ones like the Epistle of Barnabas, show that the only source of information about Jesus was scripture. 1 Peter 2:22-23, with its description of Christ's exemplary sufferings, simply summarizes parts of Isaiah 53. (Cf. 1 Clement 16.) Scripture is not the prophecy of the Christ event, but its embodiment. The Son inhabits the spiritual world of the scriptures, God's window on the unseen true reality.

The reference to Pontius Pilate in 1 Timothy 6:13 comes in a set of "Pastoral" epistles which are almost universally judged by critical scholars to be a product of the second century, and not by Paul. Mention of Pilate could therefore be a reflection of the developing idea of an historical Jesus. It may be contemporary with or a little later than Ignatius, who is the first writer outside the Gospels to maintain that Jesus died under Pilate. However, this passing reference is also a possible candidate for interpolation (later insertion). More than one scholar has pointed out that there are problems in its fit with the context, and there are many indications within the Pastorals that they are still dealing with a non-historical Christ. (See the Appendix to Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus? for an examination of the dating of the Pastorals and the question of 1 Timothy 6:13.)

Another, more obvious interpolation is 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, the only reference to the Jews' guilt in killing Jesus to be found in Paul or anywhere else in the New Testament epistles. The great majority of critical scholars agree that it comes from a later time because it contains an unmistakable allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem (a later event), and because it is foreign to the way Paul elsewhere expresses himself toward his countrymen. (On this question, see *Who Crucified Jesus?* and Reader Feedback Set 19.)

Finally, from Galatians 1:19 comes the tradition that James was the sibling of Jesus, whereas the phrase "brother of the Lord" could instead refer to James' pre-eminent position as head of the Jerusalem brotherhood. Apostles everywhere (e.g., Sosthenes in 1 Corinthians 1:1) were called "brother," and the 500 who received a vision of the spiritual Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:6 were hardly all related to Jesus. The phrase in Philippians 1:14, "brothers in the Lord," is a strong indication of what sort of meaning the Galatians phrase entails. On the other hand, it is not impossible that the phrase began as a marginal gloss, subsequently inserted into the text. Some later copyist, perhaps when a second century Pauline corpus was being formed and after James' sibling relationship to the new historical Jesus had been established, may have wished to ensure that the reader would realize that Paul was referring to James the Just and not James the Gospel apostle. (For a fuller discussion of this verse, see Reader Feedback Set 3.)

Before proceeding to the Gospels in Part Three, one question must be answered. Where and how did Christianity begin? The traditional view, of course, is that it began in Jerusalem among the Twelve Apostles in response to Jesus' death and resurrection. But this is untenable, and not just because of a lack of any historical Jesus.

Within a handful of years of Jesus' supposed death, we find Christian communities all over the eastern Mediterranean, their founders unknown. Rome had Jewish Christians no later than the 40s, and a later churchman ("Ambrosiaster" in the 4th century) remarked that the Romans had believed in Christ even without benefit of preaching by the Apostles. Paul could not possibly account for all the Christian centers across the Empire; many were in existence before he got there. Nor does he convey much sense of a vigorous and widespread missionary activity on the part of the Jerusalem circle around Peter and James. (That comes only with Acts.)

A form of Christian faith later declared heretical, Gnosticism, preceded the establishment of orthodox beliefs and churches in whole areas like northern Syria and Egypt. Indeed, the sheer variety of Christian expression and competitiveness in the first century, as revealed in documents both inside and outside the New Testament, is inexplicable if it all proceeded from a single missionary movement beginning from a single source. We find a profusion of radically different rituals, doctrines and interpretations of Jesus and his redeeming role; some even have a Jesus who does not undergo death and resurrection.

Paul meets rivals at every turn who are interfering with his work, whose views he is trying to combat. The "false apostles" he rails against in 2 Corinthians 10 and 11 are "proclaiming another Jesus" and they are certainly not from Peter's group (See Supplementary Article No. 1: Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate). Where do they all come from and where do they get their ideas?

The answer seems inevitable: Christianity was born in a thousand places, in the broad fertile soil of Hellenistic Judaism. It sprang up in many independent communities and sects, expressing itself in a great variety of doctrines. We see this variety in everything from Paul to the writings of the so-called community of John, from the unique Epistle to the Hebrews to non-canonical documents like the Odes of Solomon and a profusion of gnostic texts. It was all an expression of the new religious philosophy of the Son, and it generated an apostolic movement fueled by

visionary inspiration and a study of scripture, impelled by the conviction that God's Kingdom was at hand.

"Jesus" (Yeshua) is a Hebrew name meaning Savior, strictly speaking "Yahweh Saves." At the beginning of Christianity it refers not to the name of a human individual but (like the term Logos) to a concept: a divine, spiritual figure who is the mediator of God's salvation. "Christ," the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messiah," is also a concept, meaning the Anointed One of God (though enriched by much additional connotation). In certain sectarian circles across the Empire, which included both Jews and gentiles, these names would have enjoyed a broad range of usage. Belief in some form of spiritual Anointed Savior—Christ Jesus—was in the air. Paul and the Jerusalem brotherhood were simply one strand of this widespread phenomenon, although an important and eventually very influential one. Later, in a myth-making process of its own, this group of missionaries would come to be regarded as the whole movement's point of origin. Part Three will show how many diverse strands were drawn together by the Jesus of Nazareth who first came to life in the Gospels.

Part Three:

The Evolution Of Jesus Of Nazareth

To move from the New Testament epistles to the Gospels is to enter a completely different world. In Parts One and Two, I pointed out that virtually every element of the Gospel biography of Jesus of Nazareth is missing from the epistles, and that Paul and other early writers present us only with a divine, spiritual Christ in heaven, one revealed by God through inspiration and scripture. Their Jesus is never identified with a recent historical man. Like the savior gods of the Greek mystery cults, Paul's Christ had performed his redeeming act in a mythical arena. Thus, when we open the Gospels we are unprepared for the flesh and blood figure who lives and speaks on their pages, one who walked the sands of Palestine and died on Calvary in the days of Herod and Pontius Pilate.

Scholars are inching ever closer to understanding how and when the Gospels were written. The names Mark, Matthew, Luke and John are accepted as later ascriptions; the real authors are unknown. That "Mark" wrote first and was reworked by "Matthew" and "Luke," with other material added, is now an accepted principle by a majority of scholars. Some of the problems which called Markan priority into question, such as those passages in which Matthew and Luke agree in wording but differ from that of similar passages in Mark, have been solved by another telling realization: that each of the canonical Gospels is the end result of an early history of writing and re-writing, including additions and excisions. The Gospel of "John" is thought to have passed through several stages of construction. Thus, Matthew and Luke, writing independently and probably unknown to each other, used an earlier edition (or editions) of Mark which would have conformed to their agreements. The concept of a unified Gospel, let alone one produced by inspiration, is no longer tenable.

This picture of Gospel relationships is really quite astonishing. Even John, in its narrative structure and passion story, is now considered by many scholars (see Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p.239) to be based on Mark or some other Synoptic stage. Gone is the old pious view that the four Gospels are independent and corroborating accounts. Instead, their strong similarities are the result of copying. This means that for the basic story of Jesus' life and death we are dependent on a single source: whoever produced the first version of Mark. By rights, our sources should be numerous. Christian missionaries, supposedly led by the Twelve Apostles, fanned out across the empire; oral transmission, we are told, kept alive and constantly revitalized the story of Jesus' words and deeds. Written versions of that story should have sprung up in many centres, truly independent and notably divergent. Yet when Matthew comes to write his own version of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, all he can do is slavishly copy some document he has inherited, adding a few minor details of his own, such as the guard at the tomb. Luke does little more.

We face the same question with Acts. Why did only one writer, and that probably well into the second century (see Part One), decide to compose a history of the origin and growth of the early church? No other writer so much as mentions Pentecost, that collective visitation of the Spirit to the apostles which, according to Acts, started the whole missionary movement. But if instead this movement was a widespread diverse one, something uncoordinated and competitive (as Paul's letters suggest), expressing a variety of doctrine within the broad religious inspiration of the time, it is easier to understand how one group, seeking to impose the missing unity and give itself authority, could create its own unique picture of Christianity's beginnings.

When were the Gospels—or their earliest versions—written? Mark is usually dated by its "Little Apocalypse" in Chapter 13, which tells of great upheavals and the destruction of the Temple, spoken as a prophecy by Jesus. This must, it is claimed, refer to the first Jewish War (66-70);

thus Mark wrote in its midst or shortly after. But even Mark is presumed to have drawn on source elements, and some think this Little Apocalypse could originally have been a Jewish composition (with no reference to Jesus), one that Mark later borrowed and adapted. Or, if Chapter 13 is by Mark, it could well have grown out of a later period, for other documents, like Revelation and some Jewish apocalypses, show that vivid apocalyptic expectations persisted until at least the end of the century. In fact, 13:7 has Jesus warning his listeners not to regard the End as imminent even when the winds of war arrive. Nothing in Mark should force us to date him before the 90s.

The dates assigned to Matthew and Luke (and even John) are influenced by the picture they present of "the parting of the ways" between Christianity and the wider Jewish establishment. This is recognized as a later development following the Jewish War, one which the Gospels read back anachronistically into the supposed time of Jesus. Luke has also abandoned the expectation of an imminent end of the world, placing him even later. None of these factors are inconsistent with dates around the turn of the second century or somewhat later.

But equally important is attestation. When do the Gospels start to show up in the wider record of Christian writings? If Mark is as early as 70, and all four had been written by 100, why do none of the early Fathers—the author of 1 Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas—writing between 90 and 130, quote or refer to any of them? How could Ignatius (around 107), so eager to convince his readers that Jesus had indeed been born of Mary and died under Pilate, that he had truly been a human man who suffered, how could he have failed to appeal to some Gospel account as verification of all this if he had known one?

Eusebius reports that in a now-lost work written around 125, bishop Papias mentioned two pieces of writing by "Matthew" and "Mark." But even these cannot be equated with the canonical Gospels, for Papias called the former "sayings of the Lord in Hebrew," and the description of the latter also sounds as if it was not a narrative work. Moreover, it would seem that Papias had not possessed these documents himself, for he simply relays information about them that was given to him by "the elder." He makes no comment of his own on such documents (in fact, he continues to disparage written sources about the Lord), while Eusebius and other later commentators who quote from his writings are silent about him discussing anything from the "Mark" and "Matthew" he mentions. All that Papias can tell us (relayed through Eusebius) is that certain collections of sayings and anecdotes (probably miracle stories) were circulating in his time, a not uncommon thing; the ones he speaks of were being attributed to a Jesus figure and reputed to be compiled by legendary followers of him. What is most telling, on the other hand, is that even a quarter of the way into the second century, a bishop of Asia Minor writing a book called *The Sayings of the Lord Interpreted* did not possess a copy of a single written Gospel, nor included sayings of Jesus which are identified with those Gospels.

Only in Justin Martyr, writing in the 150s, do we find the first identifiable quotations from some of the Gospels, though he calls them simply "memoirs of the Apostles," with no names. And those quotations usually do not agree with the texts of the canonical versions we now have, showing that such documents were still undergoing evolution and revision. Scholars such as Helmut Koester have concluded that earlier "allusions" to Gospel-like material are likely floating traditions which themselves found their way into the written Gospels. (See Koester's *Ancient Christian Gospels* and his earlier *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern*.) Is it conceivable that the earliest account of Jesus' life and death could have been committed to writing as early as 70 (or even earlier, as some would like to have it), and yet the broader Christian world took almost a century to receive copies of it?

If, on the other hand, the "biography" of Jesus of Nazareth was something unusual which went against the grain of current knowledge and belief, one can understand how early versions of the Gospels, written around the turn of the century, would have enjoyed only limited use and isolated reworking for at least a generation. And especially if such compositions were originally intended as largely allegorical and instructive, symbolic of the faith communities that produced them. It is also beginning to look as though Mark, Matthew and Luke originally came from one group of linked communities in the area of Syria and northern Palestine.

As for Acts, written by the same author who wrote the final version of Luke, there is no reference to it before the year 170—more than a century after the date often assigned to it. Some, such as John Knox (*Marcion and the New Testament*, 77-106, 124), view Acts as a response by the church of Rome in the mid-second century to the gnostic Marcion's view of things. The author of Acts drew on kernels of tradition about the primitive Palestinian church, but these have been recast to fit the new plot line. There are huge discrepancies between Acts and what Paul tells us in his letters. Scholarship has been forced to admit that much of Acts is sheer fabrication, from the speeches to the great sea voyage, the latter modeled on similar features in Hellenistic romances. With its discrediting as history, the true beginnings of Christianity fall into a murky shadow.

* * * *

The core of the historical Jesus precedes the Gospels and was born in the community or circles which produced the document now called "Q" (for the German "Quelle," meaning "source"). No copy of Q has survived, but while a minority disagree, the majority of New Testament scholars today are convinced that Q did exist, and that it can be reconstructed from the common material found in Matthew and Luke which they did not get from Mark.

Q was not a narrative Gospel, but an organized collection of sayings which included moral teachings, prophetic admonitions and controversy stories, plus a few miracles and other anecdotes. It was the product of a Jewish (or Jewish imitating) sectarian movement located in Galilee which preached a coming Kingdom of God. Scholars have concluded that Q was put together over time and in distinct stages. They have identified the earliest stratum (calling it Q1) as a set of sayings on ethics and discipleship; these contained notably unconventional ideas. Many are found in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount: the Beatitudes, turn the other cheek, love your enemies. A close similarity has been noted (see F. Gerald Downing, "Cynics and Christians," NTS 1984, p.584-93; Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, p.67-9, 73-4) between these maxims and those of the Greek philosophical school known as Cynicism, a counterculture movement of the time spread by wandering Cynic preachers. (Mack has declared that Jesus was a Cynic-style sage, whose connection with things Jewish was rather tenuous.) Perhaps the Q sect at its beginnings adopted a Greek source, with some recasting, one they saw as a suitable ethic for the kingdom they were preaching. In any case, there is no need to impute such sayings to a Jesus; they seem more the product of a school or lifestyle, formulated over time and hardly the sudden invention of a single mind.

This formative stage of Q scholars call "sapiential," for it is essentially an instructional collection of the same genre as traditional "wisdom" books like Proverbs, though in this case with a radical, counterculture content. Later indications (as in Luke 11:49) suggest that the words may have been regarded as spoken by the personified Wisdom of God (see Part Two), and that the Q preachers saw themselves as her spokespersons.

The next stratum of Q (labeled Q2) has been styled "prophetic," apocalyptic. In these sayings the community is lashing out against the hostility and rejection it has received from the wider establishment. In contrast to the mild, tolerant tone of Q1, Q2 contains vitriolic railings against

the Pharisees, a calling of heaven's judgment down on whole towns. The figure of the Son of Man enters, one who will arrive at the End-time to judge the world in fire; he is probably the result of reflection on the figure in Daniel 7. Here we first find John the Baptist, a kind of mentor or forerunner to the Q preachers. Dating the strata of Q is difficult, but I would suggest that this second stage falls a little before the Jewish War.

There is good reason to conclude that even at this stage there was no Jesus in the Q community's thinking. That is, the wisdom and prophetic sayings in their original form would have contained no mention of a Jesus as speaker or source. They were pronouncements of the community itself and its traditional teachings, seen as inspired by the Wisdom of God. For while Matthew and Luke often show a common wording or idea in a given saying core, when they surround this with set-up lines and contexts involving Jesus, each evangelist offers something very different. (Compare Luke 17:5-6 with Matthew 17:19-20). This indicates that Q had preserved nothing which associated the sayings with a ministry of Jesus, a lack of interest in the source of the teaching which would be unusual and perplexing.

Nor are the apocalyptic Son of Man sayings (about his future coming) identified with Jesus, which is why, when they were later placed in his mouth, Jesus sounds as though he is talking about someone else. When one examines John the Baptist's prophecy at the opening of Q (Luke 3:16-17), about one who will come "who is mightier than I," who will baptize with fire and separate the wheat from the chaff, we find no reference to a Jesus or an enlightened teacher or prophet who is contemporary to John. Rather, this sounds like a prophecy of the coming Son of Man, the apocalyptic judge, a prophecy put into John's mouth by the Q community.

Especially revealing is the saying now found in Luke 16:16: "Until John (the Baptist) there was the law and the prophets (i.e., scripture); since then, there is the good news of the Kingdom of God." This, like so much of Q, is acknowledged to be a product of the community's own experience and time (i.e., not going back to Jesus), and yet no reference to Jesus himself has been worked into this picture of the change from the old to the new. Luke 11:49 also leaves out the Son of God when speaking of those whom Wisdom promised to send.

Leading specialists on Q, such as John Kloppenborg (*The Formation of Q*), recognize that Q in its various stages has undergone considerable redaction (editing, adding and rearranging material to create a unified whole with identifiable themes and theology). But their analysis of Q3, the stratum they call the "final recension," does not go far enough. For only at this stage, I would argue, was an historical founder introduced, a figure who was now perceived to have established the community. Certain past material would have been reworked and everything attributed to this founder, including healing "miracles" which had been part of the activity of the Q preachers themselves. For the teachings, possibly no more than a simple "Jesus said" was provided, which is why Matthew and Luke had to invent their own settings. (This kind of skeletal addition is what we find in the gnostic Gospel of Thomas which is thought to have begun, in its own early stratum of sayings, as an offshoot of an early stage of Q. For more on the Gospel of Thomas, see my book review of J. D. Crossan's *The Birth of Christianity*.) This new Jesus is positioned as superior to John, who now serves as his herald. At a slightly later stage he is identified with the expected Son of Man. In the very latest layer of Q we find the stirrings of biography and a tendency to divinize this Jesus. The Temptation story (Luke 4:1-13) belongs here.

How did such a founder formulate itself in the Q mind if he had no historical antecedent? All sectarian societies tend to read the present back into the past; they personify their own activities in great founding events and heroic progenitors. The very existence of the sayings collection, the product of the evolving community, would have invited attribution to a specific originating and authoritative figure. Such a record set in a glorified past is known as a "foundation document," a

universal phenomenon of sectarian expression. (Figures such as Confucius, Lao-Tsu, Lysurgus of Sparta, the medieval Swiss William Tell, as well as other obscure sectarian figures of the ancient world, are examples of founder figures who have come to be regarded as likely non-existent.)

I also suspect that the existence of a rival sect claiming John the Baptist as its founder may have induced the Q community to develop one of its own, one touted as superior to John. It is certainly curious, in view of the picture presented by the Gospels, that there could ever have been a question in anyone's mind as to who was the greater, Jesus or John, but Q3 has to address this very point, in the so-called Dialogue between Jesus and John (Luke 7:18-35). This whole scene seems to have been constructed at a later stage of Q's development out of earlier discrete units. One of its component sayings, about going out into the wilderness to see something, is found alone in the Gospel of Thomas (No. 78), with no association to the setting or characters of Q's Dialogue. Other bare sayings in Thomas are found in more complex, reworked form in Q. All of it speaks to the artificial development of Q's founding Jesus figure.

An additional explanation for the development of this founder is suggested by Q itself. The figure of heavenly Wisdom (Sophia), once seen as working through the community, seems to have evolved into the figure of her envoy, one who had begun the movement and spoken her sayings. Myths about Wisdom coming to the world were longstanding in Jewish thought and would have played a role here. Luke 7:35 (the concluding line of the Dialogue) calls Jesus a child of Wisdom, and Matthew in his use of Q reflects an evolving attitude toward Jesus as the very incarnation of Wisdom herself. Several of Jesus' sayings in Q are recognized as recast Wisdom sayings.

Whether the Q community gave to this perceived founder the name "Jesus" cannot be certain. At a late stage of Q, there may even have been some crossover influences from earliest Gospel circles (of "Mark"). Uncovering such things is a conjectural business, as actual historical developments tend to be more subtle and complex than any academic presentation of them on paper, especially 20 centuries after the fact. It is significant that Q never uses the term Christ, for such a founder would not at this stage have been regarded as the Messiah. That role was introduced by Mark.

The wise and subtle teaching of Q1, the apocalyptic thunderings of doom of Q2, the End-time Son of Man, the "Son" who surfaces far on in Q's development, all constitute a bizarre mix, not the least because they come in sequential layers. (If supposedly authentic, in what limbo were the Q2 sayings stored until the community was ready for them? They surface nowhere else.) Only a later subsuming of all these disparate elements under one artificial figure, at a stage when the community's past was sufficiently blurred (partly by the intervening upheavals of the Jewish War), can explain the process.

But the most telling feature of the Q Jesus has proven to be the most perplexing, for he seems to bear no relationship to Paul's. Scholars continue to puzzle over the fact that Q contains no concept of a suffering Jesus, a divinity who has undergone death and resurrection as a redeeming act. Q can make the killing of the prophets a central theme (e.g., Luke 11:49-51) and yet never refer to Jesus' own crucifixion! Its parables contain no hint of the murder of the Son of God. About the resurrection, Q breathes not a whisper. Jesus makes no prophecies of his own death and rising, as he does in other parts of the Gospels. Note that in a Q passage in Luke 17, the evangelist has to insert into Jesus' mouth a prophecy of his own death (verse 25); it is not in Matthew's use of the same passage (24:23f). Most startling of all, the Jesus of Q has no obvious significance for salvation. Apart from the benefits accruing from the teachings themselves, scholars admit that there is no soteriology in Q, certainly nothing about an atoning death for sin.

The "Son who knows the Father" (Luke 10:22, a late saying recast from an earlier Wisdom saying) functions as a mediator of God's revelation—simply personifying what the Q community itself does. The Gospel of Thomas is similarly devoid of any reference to Jesus' death and resurrection.

If the founder of the sect had been murdered by the Jewish leaders, if the whole Christian movement had begun out of his death and perceived rising from the grave, it is inconceivable that Q would not have said so. In Luke 13:34-5, for example, Jesus is prophesying. Having just written that Jerusalem is the city that murders the prophets sent to her, how could the Q compiler have resisted putting in a reference to the greatest murder of all? As for the saying in Luke 14:27 about disciples "taking up their cross" and following Jesus, this is recognized as a Cynic-Stoic expression, possibly of the Jewish Zealots as well, not a reference to Jesus' own cross. (See R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p.161; Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel*, p.138-9; Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p.235.) David Seeley ("Jesus' Death in Q," NTS 38, p.223f) summarizes the situation: "[N]ot one of the passages in which prophets are mentioned refers to Jesus' death. Such a reference must be assumed." Seeley goes on to construct an argument based on this assumption, which is a classic illustration of how too much of New Testament research has traditionally proceeded.

How is this radical divergence between Paul and Q explained? It shows, say the scholars, the differing responses by different circles to the man Jesus of Nazareth. But they founder when they try to rationalize how such a strange phenomenon could have been possible. Besides, the documents reveal many more "responses" than just two. We are to believe that early Christianity was wildly schizophrenic. First Paul and other epistle writers abandoned all interest in the earthly life and identity of Jesus, turning him into a cosmic Christ who created the world and redeemed it by his death and resurrection. The Q community, along with that of the Gospel of Thomas, on the other hand, decided to ignore that death and resurrection and preserve the earthly teaching Jesus, a preacher of the coming end of the world. Between these two poles lie other incongruent conceptions. In the earliest layer of the Gospel of John, Jesus is the mythical Descending-Ascending Redeemer from heaven who saves by being God's Revealer; later he is equated with the Greek Logos. Jesus is the heavenly High Priest of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the non-suffering intermediary servant of the Didache, the mystical Wisdom-Messiah of the Odes of Solomon. Paul hints at divergent groups in places like Corinth who "preach another Jesus." In the diverse strands of Gnosticism Jesus (or Christ) is a mythical part of the heavenly pleroma of Godhead, sometimes a revealer akin to John's, sometimes surfacing under other names like Derdekeas or the Third Illuminator. (The gnostic Jesus eventually interacted with more orthodox ideas and absorbed the new historical figure into itself.) But all this out of a crucified criminal? Out of any human man?

A more sensible solution would be that all these expressions of the idea of "Jesus" and "Christ" were separate distillations out of the concepts that were flowing in the religious currents of the day (as outlined in Part Two). Scholars now admit that "the beginnings of Christianity were exceptionally diverse, varied dramatically from region to region, and were dominated by individuals and groups whose practice and theology would be denounced as 'heretical'." (Ron Cameron summarizing Walter Bauer, *The Future of Early Christianity*, p.381.) It is no longer possible to maintain that such diversity—so much of it uncoordinated and competitive—exploded overnight out of one humble Jewish preacher and a single missionary movement.

* * * *

It was inevitable that these varying expressions would gravitate toward each other. Some time in the late first century, within a predominantly gentile milieu probably in Syria, some Christian scholar or circle combined the community and founder of Q with the mythical suffering Jesus of

the Pauline type of Christ cult. Perhaps his community had a foot in both camps, an expression of classic syncretism. The result was the Gospel of Mark. Its author seems to have worked from oral or incomplete Q traditions, for his Gospel fails to include the great teachings of Jesus and prophetic pronouncements which Matthew and Luke have inherited.

What did Mark do? He crafted a ministry which moved from Galilee to Jerusalem, now the site of Jesus' death. He virtually re-invented the Apostles out of early, now-legendary figures in the Christ movement; they served mostly instructional purposes. He brought into the Jesus orbit all the figures and concepts floating about in the Christian air, like Son of God, Messiah, Son of David, the apocalyptic Son of Man.

Most important of all, he had to craft the story of Jesus' passion. Some suggest that Mark used an earlier, more primitive fashioning of Jesus' trial and execution, one John later used as well. Others think that all the famous elements of our passion story are purely Markan inventions: the scene in Gethsemane, Judas the betrayer, the denial by Peter, the actual details of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, the story of the empty tomb. Considering that no concrete evidence surfaces in the record of any pre-Markan passion story, the second option is the most likely. We owe the most enduring tale Western culture has produced to the literary genius of Mark.

Perhaps some "historicizing" of the spiritual Christ had already taken place in Christian study and preaching activities, before Mark and unrelated to Q. A similar sectarian tendency to create an idealized founding past as seen in Q may have operated in the circles of the cultic Christ. The Proclaimed was evolving into the Proclaimer. Jesus the one being preached became Jesus doing the preaching, and the Gospels ultimately functioned as the "foundation document" of Christianity as a whole. Some initial ideas in this direction, such as the name of Paul's "woman" and the period of Jesus' life, found their way to Ignatius, even without a written Gospel, although this information may have come to him as 'echoes' of the recently written Gospel of Mark. Ignatius and 1 John (probably written in the 90s) show that many were objecting to the new, radical idea that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:1f). And what was the engine of this impulse, the source of the information about the new 'historical' Jesus? We can see it in the Gospels themselves: the Jewish scriptures.

First, some general observations. Scholars have long recognized that the Gospels are made up of smaller units of the type found in Q: individual sayings or clusters of sayings, miracle anecdotes, controversy stories. They have been strung together like "beads on a string" with filler material added, narrative bits to convey some kind of sequential impression: Jesus went here, then he went there. Someone comes into the picture and asks a question so that Jesus can give the answer. It used to be thought that the separate units were reliable pieces of tradition which had passed through oral transmission, many going back to Jesus himself, others formulated within the early church in response to him. But gradually it was perceived that the evangelists had altered or fleshed out these units in ways which served their own editorial and theological purposes; many they had simply written themselves. There can be no guarantee that anything goes back to a Jesus.

As we saw in Q, many of the sayings were Hellenistic and Jewish moral maxims and popular parables; some came from Jewish wisdom teaching. The controversy stories and discipleship instructions reflected the situation of the later Christian communities. Paul's "words of the Lord" (see Part One) represent a type of preaching common to early Christian prophets: inspired communications from the spiritual Christ in heaven. These would have been preserved and eventually entered the Gospels as spoken by a historical Jesus. Collections of miracle stories were common in the ancient world, attributed to famous philosophers and wonder workers, even

to deities like the healing god Asclepius and Isis. Christian prophets were often healers and wonder workers themselves, whose exploits would later be turned into those of Jesus.

It is now recognized that the Gospels are thoroughly sectarian writings. They were a response to the "life situation" of the groups which produced them, serving their needs. They created a sacred past for the faith, one going back to divine establishment. They offered a bulwark against outside attack. They legitimated the community's beliefs and sanctioned its practices. The burning issue, for example, of association and table fellowship, whether Jew could mix with gentile, whether the ritually pure could eat meals with the impure, was solved by having Jesus portrayed as condemning the Pharisees for their obsession over purity, as one who had consorted with outcasts and gentiles. The issue of whether the Jewish Law still applied was addressed by having Jesus make rulings on it. And so on. It is easy to see how such sectarian interests, when several different communities and times were involved, would lead to the many contradictions we find in Jesus' actions and pronouncements between one Gospel and another.

Did the evangelists see themselves as writing history? Their wholesale practice of altering earlier accounts, rearranging the details of Jesus' ministry, changing the very words of the Lord himself, would suggest otherwise. It is now a maxim that the Gospels are faith documents; the evangelists had no concern for historical research as we know it.

Rather, they were engaged in a type of "midrash." Midrash was an ancient Jewish practice of interpreting and enlarging on individual or combinations of passages from the Bible to draw out new meanings and relevance, to get beyond the surface words. One way to do this was to embody them in new stories with present-day contexts. In the minds of the evangelists, the Gospels expounded new spiritual truths through a retelling of scripture. So many New Testament elements are simply a reworking of stories recorded in the Old Testament. Jesus was cast in tales like those of Moses, for example, presenting him as a new Moses for contemporary times. At the same time, in view of Q, it is quite possible that writers like Mark regarded their work as something pointing to actual history, to a figure announced in scriptural precedent. In any event, before long, such Gospels came to be looked upon as purely factual records, by gentiles who did not understand their Jewish roots, and scripture came to be seen as the prophecy of such real "events" rather than their source.

Just as scripture had earlier provided a picture of the mythical Christ of Paul, the same writings (using passages taken out of context and with no regard to their original meaning) now supplied the setting and details of a recent earthly life of Jesus. Mark brought to a head an already fledgling process and added those "biographical" elements he found in the Q traditions. Out of such components, with the Bible open before him, he fashioned his story of Jesus' ministry and passion.

Jesus had to have performed miracles because this was expected to happen in the days leading to the kingdom. Isaiah 35:5-6 said: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy."

Thus, Jesus made the lame walk and the blind see. The Messiah was even expected to raise the dead. The details of many of Jesus' miracle stories are modeled on the miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha in 1 and 2 Kings.

Both Matthew and Luke place Jesus' birth at Bethlehem because the prophet Micah (5:2) had declared that this would be the birthplace of the future ruler of Israel. After that, the two

evangelists' Nativity stories agree on virtually nothing. Scriptural midrash can be a very haphazard thing.

The Gospel account of Jesus' trial and death shows the heaviest dependence on scripture. Virtually every element of Mark's passion story, beginning with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, is based on a biblical passage. Here are a few examples:

- The prophet Hosea (9:15): "For their evil deeds I will drive them from my house." Plus Zechariah (14:21): "No trader will be seen in the house of the Lord." Jesus drives the money changers from the Temple.
- Psalm 42:5: "How deep I am sunk in misery, groaning in my distress." Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Psalm 41:9: "Even the friend whom I trusted, who ate at my table, exults in my misfortune." The betrayal by Judas. Conflict with the Jewish establishment would have provided strong motivation for coming up with the figure of Judas to represent all hostile and unbelieving Jewry.
- Isaiah 53:12: "And he was numbered with the transgressors." Jesus is crucified between two thieves.
- Psalm 22:18: "They divided my garments among them, and for my raiments they cast lots." The soldiers gamble for Jesus' clothes at the foot of the cross.

The desertion of the Apostles, the false accusations at Jesus' trial, the crown of thorns, the drink of vinegar and gall, the darkness at noon: these and other details have their counterparts in the sacred writings. The very idea that Jesus was crucified (including in the mythical phase of belief) would have come from passages like Isaiah 53:5: "He was pierced for our transgressions," and Psalm 22:16: "They have pierced my hands and my feet." The placing of Jesus' death at the time of Herod and Pilate was partly a response to the opening verses of Psalm 2. (See J. D. Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*.)

But the story of Jesus resides in scripture more than in an assortment of isolated passages. The overall concept of the Passion, Death and Resurrection has emerged out of a theme embodied repeatedly in tales throughout the Hebrew Bible and related writings. This is the story modern scholars have characterized as The Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One. We find it in the story of Joseph in Genesis; in Isaiah 53 with its Suffering Servant; in Tobit, Esther, Daniel, 2 and 3 Maccabees, Susanna, the story of Ahiqar, the Wisdom of Solomon. All tell a tale of a righteous man or woman falsely accused, who suffers, is convicted and condemned to death, rescued at the last moment and raised to a high position; or, in the later literature, exalted after death. It is the tale of how the Jews saw themselves: the pious persecuted by the powerful, the people of God subjugated by the godless. It was an image readily absorbed by the Christian sect.

The story of Jesus follows this very pattern: bearing the true message of God, he suffered in faithful silence, was convicted though innocent, ultimately to be vindicated and exalted to glory and God's presence. Jesus' redemptive role was a paradigm for Jewish motifs of suffering and atonement and destined exaltation, brought into a potent mix with Hellenistic Son (Logos) and savior god philosophies. Christianity emerged as a genuine synthesis of the leading religious ideas of the ancient world, and it set the course of Western faith for the next two millennia.

Postscript

The theory that Christianity could have begun without an historical Jesus of Nazareth has been adamantly resisted by New Testament scholarship since it was first put forward some 200 years ago. It has generally been held by a small minority of investigators, usually "outsiders." An important factor in this imbalance has been the fact that, traditionally, the great majority working in the field of New Testament research have been religious apologists, theologians, scholars who are products of divinity schools and university religion departments, not historians per se. To suggest that a certain amount of negative bias may be operating among that majority where the debate over an historical Jesus has been concerned, is simply to state the obvious. Nor is such a statement to be considered out of order, especially in the face of the common 'argument' so often put forward against the mythicist position: that the vast majority of New Testament scholars have always rejected the proposition of a non-existent Jesus, and continue to do so. In fact, the latter is simply an "appeal to authority" and cannot by itself be given significant weight.

It is true that such a bias as may exist in traditional ranks does not automatically mean that they are wrong, or that the mythicist viewpoint is correct. What we need to do is examine the negative position taken by the opposing side and consider its substance. The problem is, traditional scholarship has offered very little of substance in opposing the theory that Jesus never existed, and that is especially true in recent times. Even more progressive scholarship, such as the Jesus Seminar, has never seriously addressed the question (other than an informal opinion poll among the Seminar's members when it first began its work). Not a single first-rank critical scholar that I am aware of has devoted even an article to it, let alone a book.

Something like *The Evidence for Jesus* (1986) by R. T. France, Vice-Principal of the London Bible College, hardly fills that role, and is devoted to illuminating the figure of an historical Jesus—a largely orthodox one—not just to defending his existence. As a defense it is quite ineffectual, taking no account (since it largely predates them) of recent insights into Q, the pervasive midrashic content of Mark, the modeling of Mark's passion story on the traditional tale of the Suffering Righteous One, and much else that has given ongoing support to the no-Jesus theory. Graham Stanton, in his *The Gospels and Jesus* (1989), devotes a chapter to addressing the views of mythicist G. A. Wells. Stanton's 'case' against Wells' position is little more than a citation of Josephus, Tacitus and Pliny (discussed below)—and an appeal to the authority that comes with the majority's acceptance "that Jesus existed." Ian Wilson, in *Jesus: The Evidence* (1984), does much the same, first acknowledging the uncertainty and contradiction in the early evidence, and then having recourse to the same trio of ancient 'witnesses.' All of them raise points that show little or no understanding for the depth and sophistication of the mythicist position. J. D. G. Dunn, in his one-page "Note on Professor Wells' View" in *The Evidence for Jesus* (1985), falls back on the old timeworn explanations for Paul's silence on a human figure. He, too, asks questions that show he is trapped within the old paradigm and unable to grasp how standard objections to the mythicist position dissolve, as do many of the longstanding problems in New Testament research, when the new paradigm of an evolving historical Jesus is applied to the evidence.

In the past fifteen years we have seen the orthodox Christian story systematically dismantled by critical scholarship like that of the Jesus Seminar, many of whose members have become increasingly secular and scientific in their outlook, something to be applauded. Insights into the dubious authenticity of Christian traditions, into the derivation of the Gospels and their antecedents, into the Christian movement as it developed within the context of its time, have been coming with gathering speed, not to mention radical positions on the historical Jesus that would have been unheard of little more than a decade ago. Within such circles of modern scholarship one might expect a serious and comprehensive defense against the most threatening

position ever taken against the foundations of Christianity, one that is gaining an ever greater number of supporters and higher profile, including in several recent books published in both North America and Europe. Yet none has been forthcoming. In the absence of such a defense, an appeal to the majority viewpoint on the question of Jesus' existence is misplaced.

* * * *

The non-Christian witness to Jesus is anything but supportive of his existence. Until almost the end of the first century, there is not a murmur of him in the Jewish or pagan record. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived until about 50 CE and wrote of unusual sects like the Therapeutae and the Essenes, has nothing to say about Jesus or Christians. Justus of Tiberias, a Jewish historian who wrote in Galilee in the 80s (his works are now lost), is reported later to have made no mention whatever of Jesus. Pliny the Elder (died 79 CE) collected data on all manner of natural and astronomical phenomena, even those which were legendary and which he himself did not necessarily regard as factual, but he records no prodigies associated with the beliefs of Christians, such as an earthquake or darkening of the skies at a crucifixion, or any star of Bethlehem. The first Roman satirist to scorn a sect which believed in a crucified Judean founder who had been a god was not Martial at the end of the first century, nor Juvenal in the first half of the second century, but Lucian in the 160s. Reports of Epictetus, the great Stoic philosopher of the early second century who preached universal brotherhood to the poor and humble masses, record no knowledge on his part of a Jewish precursor. Nor does Seneca, the empire's leading ethicist during the reign of Nero, make reference to such a figure. Other historians of the time, like Plutarch and Quintilian, are equally silent.

The famous passage about Jesus in chapter 18 of Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (published around 93 CE), the so-called "Testimonium Flavianum," is widely acknowledged to be, as it stands, a later Christian interpolation. It speaks naively and devotionally of Jesus and declares him to have been the Messiah. Origen in the third century tells us that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah, a remark likely prompted by the fact that Josephus declared Vespasian the object of the messianic prophecies (in *Jewish War* 6.5.4). This remark by Origen shows that the declaration in *Antiquities* 18 did not exist in his copy. But neither does Origen or anyone else before the 4th century mention any other reference to Jesus here. Such a silence argues against the fallback claim that even though Christians later amended it, an original reference to Jesus can be extracted from the present one. This "authentic residue" of the Testimonium would not only have been positive enough to invite comment by such as Origen, it still contains opinions about Jesus that Josephus is unlikely to have held. As for the passing identification in *Antiquities* 20 that "James" was the brother of Jesus known as the Christ, there are problems in accepting this too as original to Josephus, such as his alleged use of the term "Christ" (Messiah), a subject which Josephus shows sign of being reluctant to discuss in any of his works. Thus, the Josephan references have too many problems to constitute reliable support for Jesus' existence. For a thorough examination of both Josephus' passages, see Supplementary Article No. 10: Josephus Unbound: Reopening the Josephus Question.

The Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Annals* written around 115, makes the first pagan reference to Jesus as a man executed in the reign of Tiberius. This is not likely to have been the result of a search of some archive, for the Romans hardly kept records of the countless crucifixions around the empire going back almost a century. We have no evidence of such extensive record-keeping. Besides, Tacitus is not known as a thorough researcher, which is illustrated by the fact that he gets Pilate's title wrong, something that might have been corrected had he consulted an official record. Scholars such as Norman Perrin (*The New Testament: An Introduction*, p.407) acknowledge that Tacitus' "information" probably came from local Christian hearsay and police interrogation; this would have been at a time when the idea of an historical founder had recently

taken hold in Rome. There is even some reason to doubt the authenticity of this passage, despite its vilifying description of Christians. The association of a persecution of Christians with the great fire in Nero's Rome (the context of Tacitus' reference) is nowhere mentioned by Christian commentators for the next several centuries.

Pliny the Younger's well-known letter to Trajan, written from Asia Minor around 112 and asking the emperor for advice on the prosecution of Christians, says nothing about a recent historical man, let alone biographical elements. "Christ," perhaps a reference to the Jewish Messiah idea, is simply identified as a god in Christian worship. And the historian Suetonius' reference (around 120) to "Chrestus" as someone, or some idea, that has produced agitation among Jews in Rome, is so flimsy and uncertain, no secure meaning can be drawn from it, much less a connection to Christianity and an historical Jesus. It could be referring to Jewish messianic expectation or to an early belief in a divine Christ.

There are those who appeal to obscure references in the historians Thallus and Phlegon about eclipses of the sun allegedly associated with the crucifixion, but such pagan writers, their works now lost, come to us only through Christian commentators. The latter could well have put their own spin on reports which originally had nothing to do with a Jesus, but simply referred to an eclipse of the sun which astronomers date in the year 29. Certainly, there are no other reports at the time among either Mediterranean writers or others around the world about a universal darkness at midday.

As for the references to Jesus in the Jewish Talmud: even though some remarks are attributed to rabbis who flourished around the end of the first century (none earlier), they were not written down before the third century and later. Such records cannot be relied upon to preserve authentic traditions of a few centuries earlier, ones that may have been influenced by, or created in response to, Christian claims of the second century and later. In any case, such references are often so cryptic and off the mark they can scarcely be identified with the Gospel figure. Some have him dying by stoning or hanging, rather than by crucifixion. One places Jesus in the time of the Maccabean king Alexander Jannaeus around 100 BCE; another identifies the husband of Jesus' mother as someone who is said to have been a contemporary of rabbi Akiba in the second century CE. All of them allot responsibility for the death of this figure solely to the Jews, a strange situation in Jewish rabbinic tradition if the Gospel story were history and widely known. As a witness to an historical Jesus, the Talmudic references are worthless.

* * * *

There are a number of fundamental problems in mainstream New Testament research that can be dealt with under the heading of "Five Fallacies" which that research has traditionally been guilty of. (I will assume the reader's familiarity with Parts One to Three.) The First Fallacy is the idea that Jews, both in Palestine and across the empire, could have come to believe—or been converted to the idea by others—that a human man was the Son of God. Within a handful of years of Jesus' supposed death we know of Christian communities all over the eastern Mediterranean, many of them involving at least some Jewish adherents. Such Christians may have been numerous and troublesome enough in Rome to be expelled by Claudius as early as the 40s. At the very least, Paul in Romans speaks of a congregation of the Christ that has been established in the capital of the empire "for many years" (15:23). Traditional Christian views have maintained that such communities were the product of dusty disciples from Judea who went off to centers big and small and almost overnight managed to convince great numbers of Jews (as well as gentiles) that a humble preacher they had never seen or heard of, executed in Jerusalem as a subversive, had risen from the dead, redeemed the world, and was in fact God's pre-existent Son who had helped him create the universe. This is an incredible proposition.

I said in Part One that Judaism's fundamental theological tenet was: God is one. It is true that the first Jewish Christians, such as Paul, were flirting with a compromise to monotheism in postulating a divine Son in heaven, even though he was entirely spiritual in nature and was conceived of as a part of God; this Son was derived from scripture and was an expression of the prominent philosophical idea of the age that the ultimate Deity gave off emanations of himself which served as intermediaries with the world. But this is a far cry from turning a recent man who had walked the sands of Palestine into part of the Godhead. (It was essentially gentiles who were later to create such an idea, and it produced the "parting of the ways" between the Christian movement and its Jewish roots.) Almost any Jew would have reacted with apoplexy to the unprecedented message that a man was God. In a society in which the utter separation of the divine from the human was an obsession, the Jewish God could not be represented by even the suggestion of a human form, and thousands bared their necks before the swords of Pilate simply to protest against the human images on Roman standards being brought into the city to overlook the Temple. To believe that ordinary Jews were willing to bestow on any human man, no matter how impressive, all the titles of divinity and full identification with the ancient God of Abraham is simply inconceivable.

Paul is not only assumed to have done this, but he did so without ever telling us that anyone challenged him on it, that he had to defend such a blasphemous proposition. His comment in 1 Corinthians 1:23 that the cross of Christ is a "scandal" refers to his idea that the divine Messiah had been crucified (a spiritual figure in a mythical setting), not that a recent man was God.

The Second Fallacy is an extension of the first, and I touched on it in Part Three. Scholars are faced with a bewildering variety of expression in earliest Christianity. Many circles of belief lacked fundamental Christian doctrines, and different aspects of Jesus are said to have been preserved by separate groups. Modern critical scholarship has put forward a curious scenario to explain all this. Various groups who came in contact with Jesus or the missionary movement about him are supposed to have focused on different aspects of him, some exclusively on the teachings, others on the miracles, still others on the message about his death and perceived resurrection as a redeeming act. Some came up with unique interpretations of him. Some of these groups saw him in entirely human terms, while others, like Paul, turned him into God and abandoned all interest in his pre-resurrection earthly life and identity. Burton Mack (in *A Myth of Innocence*, p.98f) suggests that this cultic deification of Jesus took place under the influence of gentiles in Hellenistic circles like Antioch. But this hardly explains Paul, allegedly a Jew born and bred, who was converted within two to five years of Jesus' supposed death. Did a whole Hellenistic mythology develop around Jesus almost overnight, in the heart of Jerusalem—and Paul accepted it? Or did he not believe in Jesus as the Son of God right from the start? Perhaps we are to view the theology of Paul's letters, our earliest record written two decades later, as a result of the insidious influence of gentiles at Antioch.

Such scenarios fail to provide any convincing explanation for why such an immediate fragmentation would have taken place, why the Christian movement began as "fluid and amorphous" (James Robinson in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, p.114f). Mack admits that "much of the evidence is secondhand, and all of it is later." Out of a record of multiplicity, Christian scholars have deduced a single founder and point of origin which is based on a later stage: the Gospel story, formed by the postulated reconvergence of the original diverging strands. But no document records this initial phenomenon of differing "responses" to the historical man, this break-up of Jesus into his component parts. Given a record whose earliest manifestation is nothing but diversity, common sense requires us to assume the likelihood that this was in fact the incipient state, and that the new faith arose in many different places with many different expressions. Some elements, such as the teachings, would have had no

connection to a Jesus in their early stages. Most of this diversity was later to be drawn together and recast under a composite new figure, courtesy of the evangelists.

The above type of scenario involves a Third Fallacy. Scholars have long asked questions like that of Elizabeth Schlüsser-Fiorenza ("Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament" in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, p.34): "Why do the hymns use the language of myth to speak of Jesus of Nazareth who was not a mythic figure but a concrete historical person?" I pointed out in Part One that the very earliest expression about Jesus we find in the Christian record presents him solely as a cosmic figure, the pre-existent creator and sustainer of the universe (Paul and his school), a heavenly High Priest and Platonic Logos-type entity (Epistle to the Hebrews), a descending redeemer in the spiritual realm (the pre-Pauline hymns), and so on. All such presentations of Jesus are said to be ways various circles adopted of "interpreting" the man Jesus of Nazareth—according to sacred scripture and current philosophical and mythical concepts. But it would help if any of these early writers gave us even a hint that such an intention was anywhere in their minds. How are we to understand an "interpretation" when the thing supposedly being interpreted is never mentioned? John Knox (*Myth and Truth*, p.59) points to Ephesians 1:3–10 as a kind of mythological drama created to explain Jesus, entirely in supernatural terms. Knox speaks of "the remembered man Jesus" and "the wonder of his deeds and words." But where are these things in Ephesians 1:3–10, or anywhere else? He says that the myth has been created based on memories of the Lord, but where are those memories? We cannot accept Knox's claim that the myth in Ephesians is built upon "historical data" when that data is never pointed at or even alluded to. A better explanation would be that the historical data has been added to the myth at a later time. The whole concept that early Christian writers are "interpreting" Jesus of Nazareth even when they never mention him is a blatant "reading into" the text on the part of those who must see the presumed historical figure behind all this scriptural and mythological presentation.

Scholars, in seeking an explanation for Paul's blanket silence on the historical Jesus, have given us a Fourth Fallacy. They rationalize that Paul "had no interest" in Jesus' earthly incarnation, that his theology did not require it. This is difficult to fathom. Paul's faith is centered on the crucifixion. What bizarre mental processes could have led him to disembodied it, to completely detach it from its historical time and place, from the life which culminated on Calvary? Why would he transplant the great redeeming act to some mythological realm of demonic powers who were responsible for "crucifying the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8)? Why would he give Christ "significance only as a transcendent divine being" (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus*, p.3)?

And what of the details of Jesus' life? Could Pilate not have served Paul as an example of the "wisdom of the world" which could not understand the "wisdom of God"? For Paul, baptism is the prime sacrament of Christian ritual; through it believers receive the Spirit and are adopted as sons of God. Yet we are to assume that Paul, in presenting his baptismal rite (such as in Romans 6), cared nothing about Jesus' own baptism by John, about such traditions that he had received the Spirit in the form of a dove, that he had been adopted as Son by the Father in the voice from heaven. We are to assume that in all the bitter debates he engaged in through his letters, such as on the validity of the Jewish dietary laws, Paul never felt a need to introduce the Lord's own actions and teachings concerning the subjects under dispute. Are we to accept, too, that Jesus' earthly signs and wonders would not have been an incalculable selling point to gentiles, immersed as they were in popular pagan traditions of the wonder-working "divine man," a concept which fitted the earthly career of Jesus to a "T"? And are we to believe that, even if Paul had expunged Christ's human life from his own mind, his audiences and converts likewise felt no interest and did not press him for details of Jesus' earthly sayings and deeds—something of which he shows no sign in his letters? In any event, explanations for Paul's silence and lack of

interest would have to apply to all the other early epistle writers, who are equally silent—a situation so extraordinary as to defy rationalization. Amid such considerations, the argument from silence becomes legitimate and compelling.

Finally, many today find increasingly acceptable the direction which most recent liberal scholarship seems to be following: that Jesus was only a man, a Jewish preacher who was somehow divinized after his death, a death which did not result in resurrection. But here it seems that they face an insurmountable dilemma, a Fifth Fallacy. First of all, such a divinization on the scale that Jesus underwent would have been unprecedented, and there is no more unlikely milieu for this to have happened in than a Jewish one. Nor is this divinization gradual, a graph line which ascends as his reputation grows, as the things he did in his life took on magnified stature and interpretation. Rather, at the earliest we can see any evidence for it, Jesus is already at the highest point, cast in an entirely mythological picture: fully divine, pre-existent before the creation of the world, moving in the celestial spheres and grappling with the demonic forces. Those deeds of his life which should have contributed to such an elevation are nowhere in evidence.

Let's put the dilemma this way: If this man Jesus had had the explosive effect on his followers that is said of him, and on the thousands of believers who responded so readily to the message about him, such a man would have had to blaze in the firmament of his time. That impact would have been based on the force of his personality, on the unique things he said and did. There is no other way.

And yet the picture we see immediately after Jesus' death, and for the next two generations in every extant document, flatly contradicts this. The blazing star immediately drops out of sight. No contemporary historian, philosopher or popular writer records him. There is no sign of any tradition or phenomenon associated with him. For over half a century Christian writers themselves totally ignore his life and ministry. Not a saying is quoted and attributed to him. Not a miracle is marveled at. No aspect of his human personality, anchored within any biographical setting, is ever referred to. The details of his life, the places of his career: they raise no interest in any of his believers. This is an eclipse that does not even grant us a trace of a corona!

If, on the other hand, Jesus was simply an ordinary human man, a humble (if somewhat charismatic) Jewish preacher, who really said little of what has been imputed to him, who performed no real miracles, and who of course did not rise from the dead—all of which might explain why he attracted no great attention and could have his life ignored as unimportant by his later followers—what, then, is the explanation for how such a life and personality could have given rise to the vast range of response the scholars postulate, to the cosmic theology about him, to the conviction that he had risen from the dead, to the unstoppable movement which early Christianity seems to have been? This is an unsolvable dilemma.

If all we have in the earliest Christian record is this cosmic divine figure who moves in mythological spheres—just like all the other savior deities of the day—are we not compelled by scientific principles to accept that this and no more was the object of early Christian worship? If, to support this, we can present within the evidence a logical process by which such a figure can be seen to take on a biography and a place in history, do we have any justification for continuing to maintain that the divine, cosmic Christ grew out of the human Jesus of Nazareth?

* * * *

"As a historian I do not know for certain that Jesus really existed, that he is anything more than the figment of some overactive imaginations....In my view, there is nothing about Jesus of

Nazareth that we can know beyond any possible doubt. In the mortal life we have there are only probabilities. And the Jesus that scholars have isolated in the ancient gospels, gospels that are bloated with the will to believe, may turn out to be only another image that merely reflects our deepest longings." Robert W. Funk, Jesus Seminar Founder and Co-Chair. (From *The Fourth R*, January-February 1995.)

The Second Century Apologists

The Christian Apologists of the second century present us with a dramatic picture of continuing diversity in the Christian movement and, among most of them, a surprising and revealing silence on Jesus of Nazareth.

The first 100 years of Christianity have received the greatest attention from Christian scholarship. Within the period up to about 130, so conventional wisdom has it, lie Jesus himself and the origins of the church, as well as all the documents which ended up in the canon of the New Testament. Also included are the surviving writings by that varied group known as the Apostolic Fathers, which reveal some of the internal conditions and conflicts within the growing movement. The period following, and running for another 100 years or so, was the age of the Apologists. These were men like Justin Martyr who presented and justified Christianity to an outside world which was largely hostile to the new faith.

In Parts One to Three of the Main Articles, I provided a picture of the origins and growth of Christianity which rejects the existence of an historical Jesus of Nazareth. One of the key features of that picture is the unusual diversity of expression to be found in the early Christian record: about the figure of Jesus, about Christian theology, ritual practice and views of salvation. This diversity points not to a human founder and single missionary movement proceeding out of him, but to a widespread and uncoordinated religious movement founded on various beliefs in a divine, intermediary Son of God, a wholly spiritual entity. A related feature is the virtually universal silence in that early record on anything to do with the human man and events known to us from the Gospels.

What do we find as Christianity enters its second 100 years? In fact, we find more of the same. Those who have studied the apologists have tended to make some surprising observations. They note how little continuity these writers show with earlier traditions. Their ideas often have nothing in common with those of the New Testament epistles and even the Gospels. There is no dependence on Paul. Moreover, such writers seem not to move in ecclesiastical circles. Even Justin, though he worked in Rome, has nothing to say about bishops and church organizations. And almost all of them before the year 180 (Justin being the major exception) are silent on the Gospels and the figure of Jesus contained in them. In fact, one could say that they pointedly ignore any historical figure at all.

This astonishing state of affairs, taken with the fact that the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles show no sign of surfacing in any other Christian writers until the middle of the second century, supports the conclusion that the figure of Jesus of Nazareth was a development in Christian thought which came to life only in the Gospels and gradually, throughout the course of the second century, imposed itself on the movement as a whole.

Let's take a closer look at the evidence supplied by the Christian apologists.

Scholars specializing in the second century have characterized the Christianity of the apologists as essentially a philosophical movement. Whereas the premier expression of Christian development in the first century, the one centered around Paul and his circles, was an apocalyptically oriented phenomenon with a strong Jewish flavor and preaching a dying savior, that of the apologists, who were all located in cosmopolitan centers across much of the empire, was grounded in Platonic philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism.

Justin, the apologist about whom we know the most, came to Christianity after having investigated all the other popular philosophies of his day: the Stoics, Peripatetics (based on Aristotle), the Pythagoreans. Finally, he was schooled in Middle Platonism, the predominant philosophical outlook of the era which colored everything else, especially in its strongly religious concerns about the nature of the Deity and its relation to humanity. When Justin encountered Christianity, he judged it the best version of contemporary philosophy. In Rome, he seems to have had no connection with any ecclesiastical body, but set up his own school, teaching Christian philosophy in the manner of pagan philosophers of the time.

And what was this 'Christian philosophy' as presented by the apologists as a group? There is no question that it had roots in Jewish ideas. It preached the monotheistic worship of the Jewish God, a God touted as superior to those of the pagans. For information about this God it looked to the Hebrew scriptures. It placed great value on a mode of life founded on Jewish ethics; again, something touted as superior to the ethical philosophy of the pagans. At the same time, it derived from Platonism the concept of a Son of God, a 'second God' or Logos (Word), a force active in the world and serving as an intermediary between God and humanity. This idea of the Logos was floating in the air of most Greek philosophies and even Hellenistic Judaism.

Thus the religion of the apologists has been styled "Platonic-biblical" or "religious Platonism with a Judaistic cast." It would seem to have grown out of Jewish Diaspora circles which had immersed themselves in Greek philosophy. (Justin and others, including the movement known as Gnosticism, provide evidence of heretical Jewish sects, with many gentiles attached, which had evolved a great distance from traditional Jewish thinking.) There is little to suggest that this religion proceeded out of the first century branch of Christian development surrounding Paul. There is none of Paul's or the Gospels' focus on the Messiah/Christ or the end of the world, and the apologists' views of salvation are rooted in Greek mysticism, not Jewish martyrology for sin. Instead, the two expressions seem like separate branches of a very broad tree.

Justin, and whoever recast the Gospel of John to include the Prologue, with its hymn equating the Logos with Jesus, came to believe that the intermediary Word, the spiritual Son of God, had been incarnated in a human figure as recounted in the Gospels. But is this true of the apologists as a whole? The amazing fact is, that of the five or six major apologists up to the year 180 (after that, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are all firmly anchored in Gospel tradition), none, with the exception of Justin, introduces an historical Jesus into their defences of Christianity to the pagans.

Consider Theophilus of Antioch. According to Eusebius, he became bishop of the Christian community in that city in 168, but one has to wonder. In his treatise *To Autolycus*, apparently written toward the year 180, he tells us that he was born a pagan and became a Christian after reading the Jewish scriptures, a situation common to virtually all the apologists.

But what, for Theophilus, is the meaning of the name "Christian"? The Autolycus of the title has asked him this question. He answers (I.12): "Because we are anointed with the oil of God." (The name "Christ" itself means Anointed One, from the anointed kings of Israel.) In fact, Theophilus never mentions Christ, or Jesus, at all! He makes no reference to a founder-teacher; instead, Christians have their doctrines and knowledge of God through the Holy Spirit. Along with the pronouncements of the Old Testament prophets, he includes "the gospels" (III.12), but these too are the inspired word of God, not a record of Jesus' words and deeds. When he quotes ethical maxims corresponding to Jesus' Gospel teachings, he presents them (II.14) as the teaching of these gospels, not of Jesus himself.

And what is Theophilus' Son of God? He is the Word through whom God created the world, who was begat by him along with Wisdom (II.10). He is the governing principle and Lord of all creation, inspiring the prophets and the world in general to a knowledge of God. Yet Theophilus has not a thing to say about this Word's incarnation into flesh, or any deed performed by him on earth. In fact, he hastens to say (II.22) that this is not a Son in the sense of begetting, but as innate in the heart of God. Here he seems to quote part of the opening lines of the Gospel of John, the Word as God and instrumental in creation, but nothing else. Is this from the full-blown Gospel, or perhaps from the Logos hymn John drew upon? (The name "John", the only evangelist mentioned, could be a later marginal gloss inserted into the text; but see below.) Such writers, Theophilus says, are inspired men, not witnesses to an historical Jesus.

As for redemption, all will gain eternal life who are obedient to the commandments of God (II.27). There is no concept in Theophilus of an atoning sacrificial death of Jesus, a death he never mentions. And when challenged on his doctrine that the dead will be raised (Autolycus has demanded: "Show me even one who has been raised from the dead!"), this Christian has not a word to say about Jesus' own resurrection. He even accuses the pagans of worshipping "dead men" (I.9) and ridicules them for believing that Hercules and Aesclepius were raised from the dead (I.13). All this, in answer to an Autolycus who has asked: "Show me thy God."

Athenagoras of Athens, who worked in Alexandria, wrote around the same time, though one ancient witness places him a few decades earlier. He was a philosopher who had embraced Christianity, but he shows no involvement in any church, or interest in rituals and sacraments. In *A Plea For the Christians* addressed to the emperor, he says this of his new beliefs (10): "We acknowledge one God . . . by whom the Universe has been created through his Logos, and set in order and kept in being . . . for we acknowledge also a Son of God . . . If it occurs to you to enquire what is meant by the Son, I will state that he is the first product of the Father (who) had the Logos in himself. He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things."

Unfortunately, in the course of 37 chapters, Athenagoras neglects to tell the emperor that Christians believe this Logos to have been incarnated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He dissects contemporary Platonic and Stoic philosophy, angels and demons, as well as details of various Greek myths, but he offers not a scrap about the life of the Savior. He presents (11) Christian doctrine as things "not from a human source, but uttered and taught by God," and proceeds to quote ethical maxims very close to parts of the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you" Other quotations he labels as coming from scripture, or from "our teaching." Are these ethical collections that are unattributed to Jesus? Athenagoras never uses the term "gospel"; he speaks of "the witness to God and the things of God" and enumerates the prophets and other men, yet he ignores what should have been the greatest witness of them all, Jesus of Nazareth.

With no incarnation, there is in Athenagoras' presentation of the Christian faith no death and resurrection of Jesus, no sacrifice and Atonement. Eternal life is gained "by this one thing alone: that (we) know God and his Logos" (12). In fact, the names Jesus and Christ never appear in Athenagoras. Yet he can say (11), "If I go minutely into the particulars of our doctrines, let it not surprise you." One might be forgiven for regarding this as blatant dishonesty.

The anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus* is often included with the Apostolic Fathers. But it is really an apology, a defence of Christianity addressed probably to an emperor, either Hadrian or Marcus Aurelius. Most scholars lean to the earlier date (c.130). The writer goes so far as to say that the ultimate God sent the Logos, his Son, down to earth, but no time, place, or identity for this incarnation are provided. The name Jesus never appears. The Son revealed God, but is not portrayed as a human teacher.

We find an allusion (9) to the Atonement: "He (God) took our sins upon himself and gave his own Son as a ransom for us," but his description of this act is based on scripture. No Gospel details are mentioned, no manner of the Son's death (if that's what it was), no resurrection. All this is in response to Diognetus' "close and careful inquiries" about the Christian religion. (The final two chapters of the sole surviving manuscript, which contain a reference to apostles and disciples of the Word, have been identified as belonging to a separate document, probably a homily from the mid to late second century.)

We turn now to Tatian, a pupil of Justin. He was converted to Christianity, he says, by reading the Jewish scriptures. At a later stage of his career, after apostatizing to the heretical sect of the Encratites and going off to Syria, Tatian composed the *Diatessaron*, the first known harmony of the four canonical Gospels. But while still in Rome, sometime around 160, he wrote an *Apology to the Greeks*, urging pagan readers to turn to the truth. In this description of Christian truth, Tatian uses neither "Jesus" nor "Christ" nor even the name "Christian." Much space is devoted to outlining the Logos, the creative power of the universe, first-begotten of the Father, through whom the world was made—but none to the incarnation of this Logos. His musings on God and the Logos, rather than being allusions to the Gospel of John, as some claim, contradict the Johannine Prologue in some respects and may reflect Logos commonplaces of the time. Resurrection of the dead is not supported by Jesus' resurrection. Eternal life is gained through knowledge of God (13:1), not by any atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

In Tatian's *Apology* we find a few allusions to Gospel sayings, but no specific reference to written Gospels and no attribution of such things to Jesus. Instead, all knowledge comes from God himself. Tatian says he was "God-taught" (29:2). He does, however, make a revealing comment about mythical stories, which I will return to in a moment. Finally, around the year 155, the first Latin apologist, Minucius Felix, wrote a dialogue between a Christian and a heathen, entitled *Octavius*. It too presents a Christianity without an historical Jesus, and in fact contains some startling features in this regard. I will examine it in some detail in the latter part of this article.

* * * *

Something extremely odd is going on here. If one leaves aside Justin, there is a silence in the second century apologists on the subject of the historical Jesus which is almost the equal to that in the first century letter writers. Commentators on these works, like those studying the earlier epistles, have scrambled to come up with explanations.

One is that the apologists were concerned first and foremost with preaching the monotheistic Father, the God of the Jews, while debunking the Greek myths with their all-too-human and morally uninspiring divinities. This is true. But it should not preclude them from devoting some space to the most essential feature of the faith, and besides, the apologists have no reluctance about bringing in the Son of God in the form of the Logos. In fact, the apologists as a group profess a faith which is nothing so much as a Logos religion. It is in essence Platonism carried to its fullest religious implications and wedded with Jewish theology and ethics. The figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of the Logos is a graft, an adoption which was embraced only by Justin.

Of course, the glaring anomaly which must be explained is this: how can an apologist be giving his pagan readers a meaningful picture of the Christian faith when he leaves out the most central of its elements, the figure of Jesus and what he had done for salvation? How was the reader to understand the history and origins of the movement without him?

Inevitably, commentators have been led to conclude that the omission—indeed, the suppression—of Jesus was deliberate. Pagan philosophers like Galen had challenged Christian thinkers that their faith was based on revelation rather than reasoned philosophical argument. They had ridiculed the idea of a crucified god. The heathen attitude had made it impolitic to speak of Jesus of Nazareth, and so he needed to be kept in the closet.

Too many common sense arguments tell against this 'explanation.' First, a writer like Athenagoras is quite adept at reasoned, sophisticated argument. Why not apply such talents to a justification of Christianity's principal tenet? If the world at large is maligning Jesus, surely the overriding need is to rehabilitate him, not hide him away. Second, this suppression of Jesus, the misrepresentation of everything from the name "Christian" to the source of Christian ethics, amounts to nothing less than a *denial* of Christ. The apologist is constructing a picture which excludes the central elements of the faith, falsifying his presentation, leaving no room for Jesus. He has gone beyond silence in stating, "I have said all there is to say." In an age when Christian pride and fortitude required that any penalty be faced—even the ultimate one—rather than renounce the faith, this gutting of Christian doctrine would have smacked of betrayal. It would have horrified believers and quickly discredited the apologists in Christian eyes. Could any of them really have chosen to defend the Name by expunging it?

And who would they be fooling? Any pagan who knew the first thing about Christianity would surely be familiar with the figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the movement's founder. An 'apology' for the faith which left him out would readily be seen for the sham that it was, thus foiling the whole object of the exercise. Besides, Justin, the most prominent of the apologists, felt no such qualms about placing Jesus at the center of his exposition. Tatian was someone who cared not a fig for the objections or sensibilities of any pagan. And beyond the year 180 no Christian writer felt any need or pressure to suppress Jesus.

Another important consideration is that the apologists are touting the superiority of Christian ethics and its monotheistic view of God. If Jesus had been the source of these teachings, their stature would have been raised by being presented as the product of a great teacher; while at the same time, the attribution to Jesus of this estimable body of ethics and theology would have gone a long way toward redeeming him in pagan eyes for whatever else Christians might have been claiming about him. The fact that no one but Justin has incorporated the teaching, human Jesus into his appeals to the pagan is too bizarre a situation. No, some other explanation for the silence of the bulk of the apologetic movement must be sought.

A clue to the solution of this puzzle lies in Tatian's *Apology*. In chapter 21 he says, "We are not fools, men of Greece, when we declare that God has been born in the form of man (his only allusion to the incarnation) . . . Compare your own stories with our narratives." He goes on to describe some of the Greek myths about gods come to earth, undergoing suffering and even death for the benefaction of mankind. "Take a look at your own records and accept us merely on the grounds that *we too tell stories*."

This may well be a reference to the Christian Gospels. But if he can allude to the incarnation in this way, why does he not deal with it openly and at length? His comment is hardly a ringing endorsement, or a declaration that such stories are to be accepted as history. The way Tatian compares them to the Greek myths implies that he regards them as being on the same level. Certainly, he does not rush to point out that the Christian stories are superior or, unlike the Greek ones, factually true. Nor can we get around the fact that Tatian pointedly ignores those Gospel stories in the rest of his *Apology*. (He was to change his mind by the time he composed the *Diatessaron*.) Furthermore, he ignores them even though his language clearly implies that the pagans were familiar with them.

There seems to be only one way to interpret all this. We can assume that the philosopher-apologists were familiar with the Gospel story and its figure of Jesus of Nazareth. But, with the exception of Justin, they have chosen not to integrate these elements into their own faith, not to identify this reputed historical founder-teacher with their divine Logos and Son of God, not to regard him as the source of Christian teachings.

This is possible only if the Logos religion the apologists subscribed to, especially at the time of their conversion, was lacking the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Only if they could view the Gospel story and its central character as a recent graft, a fictional tale like those of the Greeks, was it possible for them to reject it, to feel that they could be presenting the Christian faith legitimately. Only if they felt it were possible for pagans to accept the story of Jesus as a myth like their own religious myths, was it acceptable for the apologists to present to them a Christianity which ignored or rejected the figure of Jesus.

As a mix of Platonism and Hellenistic Judaism, the apologists' branch of Christianity had become prominent throughout the empire in the second century. (Paulinism had gone into eclipse until the ascendancy of the church of Rome and its rehabilitation of Paul as the latter half of the century progressed.) As we have seen, this Platonic Christianity defined itself in ways which had nothing to do with an historical Jesus. Nor is it likely to have grown out of Paulinism, as they have virtually nothing in common.

If development had been as the scholars like to present it, a shift in emphasis from the 'Palestinian' style of Christianity to one based on Greek philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism, the figure of Jesus would hardly have been dropped; he would have been integrated into the Platonic picture. This is not a Christian 'utilization' of Greek philosophy. The apologists' faith *is* the religious Platonism of the time brought into a Jewish theological and ethical setting (which rendered the Logos and the faith "anointed" or Christian). It is significant that none of them (possibly excepting Theophilus) have connections with a church.

Such a picture supports the view that Christianity, for its first 150 years, was a mosaic of uncoordinated expressions. It was a variegated organism which took root and flowered across the landscape of the empire, a widely divergent mix of Jewish and Greek features. As time went on, the distillation of Jesus of Nazareth out of certain pores in this organism spread inexorably across its entire surface, until by the year 200 he was firmly entrenched in every aspect of the faith.

Even Justin gives evidence of this picture. After reaching Rome in the 140s, he encountered some of the Gospels and embraced the historical man-god they told of. In his apologetic writings, penned in the 150s, Jesus and the Gospels occupy center stage. For Justin, the Word/Logos "took shape, became man, and was called Jesus Christ" (*Apology*, 5). But he has left us an inadvertent record of the nature of the faith he joined before his encounter with the story of a human Jesus.

The *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* was written after the *Apology*, and the latter can be dated to the early 150s. But the action of *Trypho* is set at the time of the Second Jewish Revolt, in the 130s, and scholars are confident that this represents the time of Justin's conversion, which he describes in the opening chapters.

By the sea near Ephesus Justin encounters an old man, a Christian philosopher. After a discussion of the joys and benefits of philosophy, the old man tells of ancient Jewish prophets who spoke by the Divine Spirit. These prophets, he says, had proclaimed the glory of God the Father and his Son, the Christ. (This was the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Platonic terms.) Wisdom could come only to those who have it imparted to them by God and his Christ.

At this, says Justin (8:1), "a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets and of those who are friends of Christ possessed me." Justin does not even say (despite the best attempts of some commentators) that he felt a love for Christ himself, for in the Christianity to which he was converted, Christ was a philosophical concept. He was a part of the Godhead in heaven, a Logos-type entity. This Christ is a Savior by virtue of the wisdom he imparts (8:2). This is Justin's concept of salvation here, for he goes on to conclude the story of his conversion by saying to Trypho: "If you are eagerly looking for salvation, and if you believe in God, you may become acquainted with the Christ of God and, after being initiated, live a happy life." (Later, under the influence of the Gospels, Justin laid increasing emphasis on the redeeming value of Christ's death and resurrection, but in the basic Logos religion the Son saves by revealing God.)

Where is Jesus of Nazareth in all this? The old philosopher had not a word to say about him, nor about any incarnation of the Son. We are fortunate that Justin did not recast the memory of his conversion experience in the light of his later beliefs based on the Gospels. In those opening chapters of the *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* we can see that all the apologists came to the same Christian faith: a Platonic religious philosophy grounded in Hellenistic Judaism which fails to include any historical Jesus.

Trypho himself may be a literary invention, but Justin puts into his mouth (8:6) a telling accusation, one which must have represented a common opinion of the time: "But Christ—if he has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown . . . And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves . . . " Trypho also expresses the opinion that the incarnation is incredible and even Justin admits (*Apology*, 13) that "sober-minded men" are of the opinion that "Christians are mad to give a crucified man second place to God." As we shall see, even some Christians were in agreement.

In passing, I will mention that perhaps the earliest surviving apology, that of Aristides to the emperor Antoninus Pius, a short and minor work written in Syriac around 140, is clearly dependent on some Gospel account. It speaks of God born of a virgin, having twelve disciples, pierced died and buried, then rising after three days. This apology comes from a different milieu, one located in the Palestine-Syria area (where the Synoptic Gospels were written), for it has nothing to say about the Logos or Greek philosophical concepts.

* * * *

I have left until last the most fascinating of all the apologies, a document which could well be called a 'smoking gun.' The little treatise *Octavius* was written in Rome, or possibly North Africa, in Latin. It takes the form of a debate between Caecilius, a pagan, and Octavius, a Christian, chaired and narrated by the author, Minucius Felix, by whose name the work is now usually referred to.

There has been a long and seesaw debate as to when *Minucius Felix* was written. A clear literary relationship exists with Tertullian's much longer *Apology*, written around the year 200. But who borrowed from whom? A good general rule says that the later writer tends to expand on what the earlier writer wrote, not chop drastically, especially since in this case it would mean that Minucius Felix had cut out many important Christian dogmas and every single reference to the Gospel Jesus—and this, well into the third century, when no one else had any qualms about speaking of such things. This and other arguments considered, the earlier dating between 150 and 160 is much preferable. (See H. J. Baylis, *Minucius Felix* [1928], p.273.)

In this debate, the names of Christ and Jesus are never used, though the word "Christian" appears throughout. Nor is there any allusion to the Son or Logos. Octavius' Christianity revolves around the Unity and Providence of God and the rejection of all pagan deities, the resurrection of the body and its future reward or punishment. In regard to the latter, no appeal is made to Jesus' own resurrection as proof of God's ability and intention to resurrect the dead. Not even in answer to the challenge (11): "What single individual has returned from the dead, that we might believe it for an example?" Much of Octavius' argument is devoted to countering the calumnies against Christians which Caecilius, representing general pagan opinion, enumerates: everything from debauchery to the devouring of infants, to Christian secrecy and hopes for the world's fiery destruction.

But here is where it gets interesting. For no other apologist but Justin has voiced and dealt with one particular accusation which the writer puts into the mouth of Caecilius. The list of calumnies in chapter 9 runs like this (partly paraphrased):

"This abominable congregation should be rooted out . . . a religion of lust and fornication. They reverence the head of an ass . . . even the genitals of their priests . . . *And some say that the objects of their worship include a man who suffered death as a criminal, as well as the wretched wood of his cross; these are fitting altars for such depraved people, and they worship what they deserve . . .* Also, during initiations they slay and dismember an infant and drink its blood . . . at their ritual feasts they indulge in shameless copulation."

Remember that a Christian is composing this passage. (The sentence in italics is translated in full.) He has included the central element and figure of the Christian faith, the person and crucifixion of Jesus, within a litany of ridiculous and unspeakable calumnies leveled against his religion—with no indication, by his language or tone, that this reference to a crucified man is to be regarded as in any way different from the rest of the items: disreputable accusations which need to be refuted. Could a Christian author who believed in a crucified Jesus and his divinity really have been capable of this manner of presentation?

In Octavius' half of the debate, he proceeds eventually to the refutation of these slanders. Here are some of the other things he says along the way.

In ridiculing the Greek myths about the deaths of their gods, such as Isis lamenting over the dismembered Osiris, he says (22): "Is it not absurd to bewail what you worship, or worship what you bewail?" In other words, he is castigating the Greeks for lamenting and worshipping a god who is slain. Later he says (23): "Men who have died cannot become gods, because a god cannot die; nor can men who are born (become gods) . . . Why, I pray, are gods not born today, if such have ever been born?" He then goes on to ridicule the whole idea of gods procreating themselves, which would include the idea of a god begetting a son. Elsewhere (20) he scorns those who are credulous enough to believe in miracles performed by gods.

How, without any saving qualification, could a Christian put such arguments forward, since they would confute and confound essential Christian beliefs *in his own mind*, and leave himself open to the charge of hypocrisy? It is one thing for the puzzled commentator to claim that silences in the apologists are due to a desire not to discourage or irritate the pagans with long and confusing theological treatises on subjects they are prejudiced against, or because they are not aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of the faith. But when an apologist makes statements which flatly contradict and even calumnize ideas which should be at the very heart of his own beliefs and personal devotion, such explanations are clearly discredited.

And how does Minucius Felix deal with the accusation that Christians worship a crucified man and his cross? As he did in Caecilius' diatribe, the author inserts his response into the midst of

his refutation of other calumnies about incestuous banquets and adoration of a priest's genitals. Here is the manner and context in which he deals with the charge of worshiping a crucified criminal (29):

"¹These and similar indecencies we do not wish to hear; it is disgraceful having to defend ourselves from such charges. People who live a chaste and virtuous life are falsely charged by you with acts which we would not consider possible, except that we see you doing them yourselves. ²Moreover (*nam*), when you attribute to our religion the worship of a criminal and his cross, you wander far from the truth in thinking that a criminal deserved, or that a mortal man could be able, to be believed in as God. ³Miserable indeed is that man whose whole hope is dependent on a mortal, for such hope ceases with his (the latter's) death"

Before going on, we should first note that verse 2, following as it does on the sentiments of verse 1 (which the Latin word *nam* emphasizes), makes it clear that the writer regards this accusation as being in the same vein as the other "indecencies" he is at pains to refute. And what is the refutation he provides? It is to heap scorn on those who would believe that a crucified criminal, a mortal, should be thought of as a god. Where is the necessary qualification that no Christian could surely have remained silent on? Where is the saving defence that in fact this crucified man was not a mortal, but was indeed God? Some claim that this is what Minucius is implying, but such an implication is so opaque, it can only be derived from reading it into the text. Octavius' words certainly do not contain it, although they do imply that the writer knows of some Christians who believe such things, but he has no sympathy with them.

The translator of this work in the 19th century collection of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (vol. IV, p.191) includes the following sentence in his summary preface at the head of chapter 29: "For they believe not only that he was innocent, but with reason that he was God." Such an idea is nowhere to be found in the text, and the context of the charge and its response cannot reasonably be said to imply it. Nor do the other things Minucius says which scorn different aspects of the Christian faith (such as gods being born in the present time or performing miracles) allow us to draw such an implication. To verse 2 the translator offers this wishful footnote: "A reverent allusion to the Crucified, believed in and worshiped as God." What one cannot believe is missing, one will read into the text, no matter what.

A more recent commentator, G. W. Clarke (*Ancient Christian Writers* #39, 1949) makes this observation in an end note: "A remarkable avoidance of any mention of the Incarnation. Indeed, so anxious is Minucius Felix to avoid admitting such a difficult doctrine that he gives the appearance of denying it." Indeed he does. And while Clarke compares this to Arnobius' "coyness" on the same topic, this later (c.300) Christian apologist was in no way reluctant or dishonest in admitting it, even though he lived at a time of greater persecution. "We worship one who was born a man. What then? Do you worship no one who was born a man? . . . But he died nailed to the cross. So what? Neither does the kind and disgrace of the death change his words or deeds." (*Against the Heathen*, I.37 & 40).

Minucius goes on in this passage to cite the folly of heathen peoples who *do* "choose a man for their worship," but he makes no such admissions for Christians. As to the accusation of worshiping crosses, he says dismissively: "We do not adore them, nor do we wish for them." And he goes on to admonish the pagan for being guilty of using signs of crosses in their own worship and everyday life. There is not a hint that for Minucius the cross bears any sacred significance or requires defending in a Christian context.

From this refutation of the calumny of Jesus and his cross, he proceeds ("Next . . .") to challenge those who accuse Christians of the slaughter of children. There is nothing in the way Minucius

has dealt with the supposed heart of the Christian faith to differentiate it from all these surrounding horrors. The disparaging tone is unredeemed.

One commentator, H. J. Baylis (*Minucius Felix*, p.148), in addition to expressing his regret that the writer has been so silent in defending the person of Christ, also laments the fact that he missed a golden opportunity to refute the charge about licentious feasts and cannibalistic initiation rites by describing the Eucharist. He could have defended, says Baylis, the sacramental significance and pure conduct of this Christian *agape* (love feast) over Jesus' body and blood. Baylis finds it equally "odd" that in speaking of the sources of the "truth about the Godhead" (38), Minucius is silent on the teachings of Jesus himself, or Jesus' own status as Son within that Godhead.

The survival of this document, with its out-and-out dismissal of the central tenets of Christianity, is perhaps surprising, but it was no doubt possible only because a certain veiled ambiguity could be read into a verse like 29:2 above, and by letting this perception override the derogatory tone and jarring silence of the passage and document as a whole. Baylis has labelled 29:2 "oblique," but Minucius' stark language rules out any such escape route. This scholar, too, reads into Minucius' defense something which is not evidently there: "Yes, we adore one who was crucified, but he is neither a criminal nor a mere man."

Those who are capable of letting historical documents say what they obviously seem to be saying will recognize that *Minucius Felix* is a true 'smoking gun' pointing to a Christian denial of the historical Jesus. Even though this document indicates that there were others within the movement who believed in such a figure, and that there were historical Jesus traditions circulating, this does not automatically validate the historicity of such a figure, especially as the author is writing no earlier than the mid-second century. But the key consideration is this: such a denial as Minucius Felix voices would hardly have been possible within the context of a movement which had actually begun with an historical Jesus, and so we can say that this document does indeed provide strong evidence of the non-existence of this figure.

To the dispassionate eye, Minucius Felix is one Christian who will have no truck with those, in other circles of his religion, who profess the worship of a Jesus who was crucified in Judea under the governorship of Pontius Pilate, rumors of which have reached pagan ears and elicited much scorn and condemnation. To claim that a whole generation of apologists would falsely convey such an exterior to those they are seeking to win over, that they would deliberately indulge in this kind of Machiavellian deception, is but one of the desperate measures which modern Christian scholars have been forced to adopt in their efforts to deal with a Christian record that stubbornly refuses to paint the picture they all want to see.

* * * *

The apologists were not fools. Their literary and polemical talents were considerable. They were versed in a wide range of ancient knowledge, in the intricate subtleties of contemporary philosophy. That they could design careful and elaborate pieces of apologetic writing that yet contained such devastating omissions and weaknesses as we have seen in Minucius Felix, in Theophilus, in Athenagoras, in Tatian, is not feasible.

If an author like Minucius Felix is being silent for political reasons, why would he choose to place in the mouth of his pagan spokesperson accusations concerning the very thing he is deliberately silent on? Why would he allow the opponent such critical and derogatory declarations about the central object of Christian worship when he has already decided he must deny himself the luxury of answering them? Why would he place in the Christian's *own* mouth,

as he does in chapters 21 and 23, sweeping and scornful statements which go against elements of the Christian faith with no possibility of offering saving qualifications? There is not even an attempt, through veiled language and implication, to assuage the 'knowing' Christian reader, to show that such saving exceptions are present in his own mind. In fact, his treatment of these faith subjects is tantamount to a denial of them.

At the end of *Minucius Felix* the writer has his pagan character converted to Christianity. But what is the use of converting someone like Caecilius to a religion which has had all its essential elements concealed? When Caecilius arrives "on the morrow" for his first lesson as a catechumen, will Octavius say to him, "Oh, by the way, there were a few details I left out yesterday." If a Christian is going to appeal to a pagan according to philosophical and logical principles, how will he then turn around and subsequently present the Christian mysteries and dogmas which he must be aware go counter to such principles? His own argumentation will then be in danger of being turned against him. And his dishonesty will place himself and his faith in a dishonorable light.

It must be stressed that nowhere in the literature of the time is there support for the standard scholarly rationalization about the apologists' silence on the figure of Jesus. Nowhere is it discussed or even intimated that these writers have in fact deliberately left out the essential elements of Christian faith in their defences of it, for reasons of political correctness or anything else. The occasionally quoted account of Origen in the third century, that he sometimes expounded his ethical views without labeling them as Christian, since he feared his listeners' hostility to the very name of Christianity and Christ, is not applicable here, for in such cases Origen was not identifying himself as a Christian at all, he was not offering a defence of Christianity, even in a limited way. If he had been, he would certainly not have left himself open to challenges he was not allowed to answer. His own writings are proof of this. Origen does not conceal Jesus or his resurrection. He counters every scoff and calumny of Celsus with all the resources at his disposal.

This is true also of Tertullian, writing his apology around the year 200 and borrowing, or at least using as inspiration, parts of the work of Minucius Felix. Tertullian indulges in no such cryptic concealment. In his own day, the hostility to Christianity was no easier than it had been a generation earlier when Felix wrote, or a mere two decades since Athenagoras and Theophilus had penned their defences. Tertullian's work is full of vivid references to Christ's incarnation, to his death and resurrection. Near the end of his account of "that Christ, the Son of God who appeared among us," he declares: "let no one think it is otherwise than we have represented, for *none may give a false account of his religion* We say, and before all men we say, and torn and bleeding under your tortures we cry out, 'We worship God through Christ!' " Apparently, if we believe the commentators, the bulk of the second century apologists possessed no such conviction, no such courage. Certainly, Tertullian would have had no sympathy with their policy of concealment. The above quote may even be a veiled condemnation of them, if he were familiar with the likes of Athenagoras or Tatian or Theophilus. Or it may have been directed at Minucius Felix himself, whose work he would have felt constrained to expand on and fill in the painfully missing blanks.

As a final note, we might ask: where are the writers (for we might expect there to be some) who openly and in unmistakable words reject the figure of Jesus, with no possibility of ambiguity? Until we realize that no such document would ever have reached us through two millennia of Christian censorship. For probably the same reason, we possess no pagan writing which discusses the case for rejection of the historical Jesus. Even Celsus (who does not do this) survives only piecemeal in Origen's great refutation of him. On the other hand, it is likely that even leading pagan thinkers like Celsus would have had no way to verify or disprove the

circulating Christian story and narrative accounts of Jesus of Nazareth, nor would they have possessed the exegetical tools and abilities to disprove Christian claims through a study of the documents themselves. In any case, all of these documents, given the poor state of communication and availability of materials in the ancient world, would hardly have been accessible to someone who might think of undertaking such a task.

Supplementary Articles:*Adding Pieces to the Jesus Puzzle*

Further studies on a wide range of topics concerning the historical Jesus and the Jesus myth. Each one adopts the viewpoint that problem questions or documents are best solved when approached from the position that there was no historical Jesus. At the same time, these articles will help provide a greater insight into the origins of Christianity, the object of its worship and the source of its ideas.

Apollos Of Alexandria And The Early Christian Apostolate

"Apostles" in Early Christianity

One of the puzzles which Paul in his letters presents to us is the nature of the apostolic movement of which he was a part. If the orthodox picture of Christian beginnings were correct, we would expect to find reference to a system of missionary preaching which traced its impulse back to the group in Jerusalem known in the Gospels as the Twelve. Figures like Peter and John, having had contact with the Master himself on earth, and appointed by him to spread the gospel message, would be regarded as authoritative, and Christian prophets working in the field would inevitably define themselves in relation to this privileged body in Jerusalem and be organized around it.

In later times, efforts were made to create such a picture. Acts, probably written well into the second century (see the Main Articles, Part One), presents a golden-age beginning for the Christian apostolic movement and makes Paul subordinate to and in agreement with the Jerusalem apostles, in blatant contradiction to Paul's own letters. The Gospel of Mark is the first to offer an inner circle of Twelve chosen by an earthly Jesus, a group for which there is virtually no evidence in the earliest record. The mention of the "twelve" in 1 Corinthians 15:5 is anything but clear, since they are listed separately from Peter and "all the apostles." (They may be an administrative body in the sect.) Paul nowhere else gives so much as a hint of chosen followers of Jesus on earth.

The word "disciple(s)" appears not once in the New Testament epistles. This is the word used in the Gospels for followers attached to a ministering Jesus, but in the epistles there is no mention of such followers or a ministry. Instead, we find only the word "apostle," meaning one who is sent out to preach, and it is used for men like Paul and Peter, Barnabas and unnamed others, who are spoken of as being called by God and inspired by the Spirit. (Note that in the Gospels, once the "disciples" are sent out by Jesus, they become "apostles": see Matthew 10:1-2.)

In Paul's frequent discussions about apostleship, any reference to a group who had known an earthly Jesus personally is conspicuous by its absence. In Galatians 2:8 he tells us that God had made Peter an apostle to the Jews just as he had made Paul an apostle to the gentiles; he is clearly allowing no distinction in quality or origin between his own apostleship and that of Peter. Outside the Gospel of Matthew, there is no mention anywhere in the first hundred years to an appointing of Peter by Jesus as the "rock" on which the church will be built. In passages like 1 Corinthians 9:1f and Galatians 1:17, there is no suggestion that the requirement (or even an advantage) for an accredited apostle has anything to do with having known an historical Jesus. Rather, the mark of the true apostle, Paul consistently tells us, is the reception of the proper revelation and authority from God.

For traditional scholars, 2 Corinthians 10-12 has proven a particularly tough nut to crack. Who are these rival apostles (not to be confused with an earlier set in 1 Corinthians, which will be dealt with below) who have come into Corinth behind Paul and won over the hearts of his congregation? They claim to "belong to Christ" (10:7). Well, so does he, Paul states, and supports his apostleship by declaring that he had been recommended by the Lord himself (meaning God). We can be sure that such rivals claimed no personal contact or links with Jesus of Nazareth, because Paul never deals with such a claim, nor could he dismiss them as he does if they had had such contact.

In fact, 11:4-6 shows the basis of these rivals' claim to authority, and it is identical to Paul's own:

"For if someone comes who proclaims another Jesus, not the Jesus whom we proclaimed, or if you then receive a spirit different from the Spirit already given to you, or a gospel different from the gospel you have already accepted, you put up with that well enough. Have I in any way come short of those superlative apostles? I may be no speaker, but I have knowledge . . ." (From the New English Bible translation)

Here Paul spells out that the source of apostolic inspiration for the preaching of the Christ is the reception of a Spirit from God. A few verses later, as he does elsewhere, Paul refers to his preaching message as "the gospel of God," and all the epistles of the New Testament (e.g., 1 Peter 1:12) focus exclusively on this revelation through God's Spirit as the force which has begun and maintains the preaching movement. The spirits received by these various apostles could be so different that Paul accuses his Corinthian rivals of "proclaiming another Jesus," of preaching "a different gospel." He goes on in 11:13 to call these rivals "sham apostles, crooked in all their practices, masquerading as apostles of Christ." He implies that they are agents of Satan, who "will meet the end their deeds deserve" (11:15). And yet a few verses later he allows, grudgingly, that they are, by some objective standard which the Corinthians accept, "servants of Christ" (11:23).

Many have been the attempts to identify these rivals with the Jerusalem group around Peter and James, or to give them some connection to that body, but there are those who sensibly recognize that such uncompromising ire and condemnation cannot be directed at the Jerusalem apostles. Rather, these are unknown missionaries of the Christ, with no connection to the Jerusalem group, and they carry ideas about the divine Son which Paul regards as so incompatible with his own that he consigns them to Satan's realm. Whether they are the same men whom he condemns and curses for preaching a different gospel to the Galatians (1:6-9) is unknown. Again, if the orthodox picture were correct, how could such a situation have arisen in the Christian apostolic movement so soon after its inception?

In fact, what Paul gives us is a familiar, timeless picture. He shows us a group of competing individuals in the passionate and unforgiving field of religious proselytizing, scratching and clawing for a bigger share of the market. They advance rival personal claims and attack one another's motives and qualifications; they are capable of going for the jugular. They are intolerant of opposing views. And they are all on a level playing field. None of them attempts any link to the man himself who is supposed to be the center of their message. No one ever draws a distinction along such lines.

This application of the concept of "apostle" to all and sundry, together with the absence of any early evidence that the term was narrowly applied to a select group chosen by Jesus, has led scholars of no less stature than Rudolf Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament*, I, page 37) to declare that the notion of an inner circle of Twelve surrounding Jesus is not historical, but a later invention. W. Schneemelcher, in *New Testament Apocrypha* (II, 25), admits that "the origin and idea of the apostolate is one of the most intricate and difficult problems of New Testament scholarship." The problem disappears, of course, when one realizes that no select group attached to Jesus shows up in the early record because there was no Master to whom they could be attached.

Apollos of Alexandria

The rival apostles we encounter in Paul's letters are unnamed. Except for one. The figure of Apollos, an apostle from Alexandria, emerges tantalizingly from the shadows in 1 Corinthians

and in Acts. Let's see what we can glean about him, and what kind of insight he provides into the nature of early Christianity.

What does Acts have to say about Apollos? Here are the key verses from 18:24-28:

"²⁴Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the Spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the new way (or, the way of God) more accurately. . . . ²⁸For he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (From the Revised Standard Version)

I support the views of John Knox, J. T. Townsend, Burton Mack, J. C. O'Neill and others, that Acts was written a number of decades into the second century. It has no clear attestation before the year 170. The writer of this document, probably the same one who redacted the final version of the Gospel of Luke, has recast whatever traditions he may have used to reflect a belief in an historical Jesus. But he has left telltale contradictions in his account. Ernst Haenchen has discussed these in his *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (p.554f).

One evident contradiction exists between statements in verses 25 and 26. The first says that Apollos taught accurately concerning Jesus, the next states that Priscilla and Aquila had to correct his teaching. Further, if Apollos taught accurately as a Christian apostle, how is it he knew only the baptism of John? John's baptism was one of purification, "in token of repentance" (19:4). Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.5.2) tells us that the baptism of John was a ritual washing to purify the body. Paul, on the other hand, baptized in the name of Jesus, which was supposed also to confer the Holy Spirit on the convert. Some scholars have questioned how Apollos could be a Christian missionary and not know the proper Christian baptism, but the answer to this little puzzle must be that no single, universal form of the rite existed at this time, and that it was possible for an apostle preaching the Christ not to be familiar with Paul's type of baptism, but to have knowledge of a different baptism of the type practiced by John.

Certain scholars (see Haenchen, *op.cit.*, p.554 and 550 n.10) have denied Apollos any Christian status at all, and see him as a Jewish preacher of repentance like John, or, more frequently, as a teacher of wisdom. He may, they say, have been the one responsible for leading Paul's Corinthian congregation astray, offering the view that the believer, through the reception of divine wisdom, could enter immediately into a state of spiritual perfection. Styling themselves "the strong," those who followed Apollos' teaching now claimed that they did not have to await eschatological developments or a future resurrection, but that through baptism they were already resurrected. All this went against Paul's own views, and he hotly contests his position against theirs throughout 1 Corinthians.

Scholarship tends naturally to interpret such wisdom teaching at Corinth (and elsewhere) as founded on an interpretation of the historical Jesus and his teachings. (See Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, p.149f.) This, of course, is based on Gospel preconceptions, but we have to note that Paul, in his efforts to counter those who have in his view misled his Corinthian congregation, fails to make any reference whatever to an earthly Jesus or to any presumed wisdom teachings of his which the opponents have supposedly misused. In a dispute over how to interpret the sayings of Jesus, neither Paul, nor apparently his opposition (since he makes no mention of such a thing), appeals to those sayings.

This silence in 1 Corinthians is almost inexplicable—except on one basis: neither Paul nor his rivals knew of any such human teacher or teachings. Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p.60-61) admits: "It is striking that Paul never quotes any of these sayings directly," referring to the wisdom sayings of Jesus which he claims "must have been known to both Paul and the Corinthians," and "must have been the basis (on) which the Corinthians claimed to have received their salvation." New Testament scholarly discussion is full of such "must be" assumptions, even in the face of the stark absence of such things from the record itself, and even as they admit astonishment at this state of affairs.

Thus, we can be fairly confident that Acts has recast traditions about Apollos in order to bring him into the fold as an orthodox preacher of an historical Jesus. But what might Apollos actually have preached? The fact that he came from Alexandria in the middle of the first century makes it highly likely that he offered a type of wisdom theology which came out of the Hellenistic Judaism of his home city, that stream of philosophy expressed in the writings of the Jewish Platonist Philo and in the document known as the Wisdom of Solomon. Apollos was probably a teacher of revealed knowledge which in itself claimed to confer salvation (Koester calls it a "life-giving wisdom"). And it may be that his preaching represented an evolution beyond earlier ideas in seeing a spiritual Christ as a concrete divine figure who was responsible for this revelation, a Christ who had grown out of Alexandrian traditions of personified Wisdom (Sophia) wedded with the Greek Logos. (See chapters 7 to 11 of the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha of most Old Testaments.)

Such an Alexandrian evolution is attested to in a set of "Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers" which have been preserved in the 4th century Christian document known as the Apostolic Constitutions. I will be making an analysis of these prayers in a future posting (see Supplementary Article No. 5). And a related picture of such evolution is evident in the Odes of Solomon, probably from northeastern Syria: see Supplementary Article No. 4.

Apollos in Corinth

But can we lift the veil on Apollos and his preaching still further by what Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians? Though he handles the subject of Apollos in chapters 1 and 3 tactfully, Paul clearly regards the Alexandrian as a rival and disapproves of his teaching. The rivalry, in fact, is so pronounced that the Corinthian congregation has broken up into cliques, specifically those who follow Paul and others who follow Apollos.

"I have been told . . . that there is quarrelling among you . . . that each of you is saying: 'I am for Paul,' or 'I am for Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas' or 'I Christ'." (1 Cor. 1:11-12)

We should first note that the third and fourth groups mentioned here are considered dubious. Was Paul referring to actual groups in Corinth who declared allegiance to "Peter" or to "Christ"? (There is no evidence elsewhere that Peter ever went to the Greek city.) Or has Paul added them as further illustrations of the concept of allegiance to particular figures, even if it is difficult to know exactly what he could have meant by that last designation? Wayne Meeks (*First Urban Christians*, p.117), Walter Bauer (*Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, p.113), Francis Watson (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, p.81f) are only some of the scholars who have doubted that Peter went to Corinth or that any party there had aligned itself with him. (Paul never discusses such a Petrine rivalry or even mentions "Judaizers" that far west.) Thus it is likely that the only cliques in the Greek city Paul is actually dealing with are those which have aligned themselves behind himself and behind Apollos.

From this introduction to the dispute in Corinth, Paul launches directly into his great discourse on the folly of worldly wisdom vs. God's wisdom, and it is folly in itself not to regard this discussion as directly relating to the dispute with Apollos. But let's delay that for a moment and consider first the next passage in which Paul directly refers to Apollos, the one in chapter 3.

Here Paul presents a series of analogies to portray the relative roles of himself and Apollos in Corinth. He is trying to handle the rivalry as diplomatically as possible. He wants to win back his Corinthian congregation without an overt attack on Apollos and those who have responded to him. But his subtlety does not hide his disapproval of Apollos' doctrine.

In 3:6 Paul states: "I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it; but God made it grow." This pride of place Paul claims for himself in the Corinthian garden (since Apollos came after him) is supplemented by another analogy in 3:10-17, that of "God's building." Here Paul "laid the foundation," which he declares is "Jesus Christ himself," meaning his personal doctrine about the Christ. Upon it, another (he uses no names here, but Apollos is clearly implied) has built a construction. And now Paul lets his animosity shine through, for he warns that the quality of that construction will have to suffer the test of fire on the day of judgment. Then, styling the Corinthians as God's temple, he warns (3:17) that "anyone who destroys God's temple will himself be destroyed by God," and he concludes his little diatribe by revisiting the theme of the foolish wisdom of the world vs. God's wisdom (which is to say, what Paul preaches).

That Apollos comes out on the short end of the critical stick in all this, or that he is to be identified among "those who fancy themselves wise" (3:18) and are in danger of divine destruction, is hardly to be doubted. See Haenchen, *op.cit.*, p.555-6, for an analysis which similarly judges Apollos as the object of Paul's condemnation, as one who preaches "a foreign element which to him appears as chaff rather than gold." Haenchen regards Apollos as "a missionary quite independent in his work and thought," reading Acts' presentation of him as having "not the slightest support in 1 Corinthians."

Wisdom and Folly

Yet I am quite sure that Haenchen has not perceived the full extent of that "chaff." It's impossible to tell from 1 Corinthians 3 exactly what Apollos preached, but what of chapter 1? In verses 17-31, following on the introduction of the dispute that has arisen in Corinth between supporters of the two apostles, Paul has condemned the "wisdom of the world" in no uncertain terms. And although he seems to broaden his net of condemnation, the fish at the center of his cast, I would argue, remains Apollos, as a preacher of worldly wisdom.

So what is the issue in chapter 1? Let's quote the key verses:

"¹⁷ . . . (I was sent) to preach the gospel, but not with words of worldly wisdom, so that the cross of Christ would not be rendered invalid [or, be voided, destroyed, robbed of its significance: there are many translations to be found of this subtle Greek verb]. ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those on their way to ruin, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . ²¹ . . . God chose to save those who have faith by the folly of the gospel. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a scandal (stumbling-block) to Jews and a folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God."

In passing, we might well ask where is Jesus of Nazareth in this "wisdom of God," the fact of the Son's incarnation into flesh, and why the elevation of a crucified criminal, a human man, to

Godhead is not also a folly to Jews and Greeks, requiring some defence, some word of reference to it, on Paul's part.

In verse 21, Paul adopts the word "folly" for himself and his own doctrine, in a self-deprecating irony. Paul's folly is in fact God's own wisdom, the wisdom in Paul's gospel message. And what is this wisdom-folly? It is the doctrine of the cross. "We proclaim Christ (having been) crucified." This is an offense to Jews and something foolish to the Greeks.

The point I want to stress is that there is no implication here that Paul is referring to some nicety of interpretation about the crucifixion or its significance. It is the fact itself of Christ crucified, the very import of the act having taken place. Paul's presentation of the Christ centers on the claim that he was crucified, and the purpose this has served in God's plan for salvation. (And crucified, incidentally, by whom? In the next chapter, 2:6-8, Paul attributes it to the demon spirits of the heavenly realm: see my Part Two article, and Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?)

It is this fundamental doctrine which both Jews and Greeks have found objectionable, that the Son of God should have undergone such a fate. And because Apollos is at the center of the net cast over the foolish wisdom of the world, the conclusion must be that Apollos, too, denies this doctrine. After all, it makes no sense that Paul would waste his time in a letter to the Corinthians—one aimed at restoring their splintered allegiance in the face of rival preaching—with arguments directed against people in general who have failed to respond to his gospel. No, those against whom he levels his accusations of folly must include Apollos, and it shows that there are Christian apostles going about preaching a Christ whose crucifixion they ignore or reject, who disparage Paul's own presentation of the Christ as a crucified deity. In other words, they have no theology of a cross.

In the context of the orthodox picture of an historical Jesus, this would be an astonishing development to have taken place only two decades after Jesus' passing, for how could any Christian preacher abandon the central element of the crucifixion if the movement, still in its infancy, had arisen out of the death of Jesus of Nazareth and his supposed resurrection? Such apostles at the time of their own conversion would surely have accepted such a doctrine. And how in their revisionist preaching could they get other Christians, ones previously converted by Paul, even to listen to them?

But, of course, the situation is much starker than this. Paul, as I said, proclaims "Christ crucified," plain and simple. Not a doctrine of the redemptive power of that event, not a claim to its importance, *but the fact itself as an item of religious faith*. Again, the inference to be drawn is that Paul's rivals have no such doctrine at all. Paul would be discussing *his* brand of wisdom, Christ crucified, only if the troublemakers in Corinth were advocating the brand of wisdom he disparages, that which considers the cross a stumbling-block and a folly. Thus Paul's opponents, Christian apostles and Apollos himself, preach a Christ who was not crucified, a Christ about whom such a feature was unacceptable, something foolish. In Paul's view, they are the ones "on their way to ruin" (1:18), the sort of language he uses (see 2 Corinthians 10 and 11 and Galatians 1:6f) not for the wider non-believing world but for rivals who preach a different concept of Jesus.

If this were not an out-and-out rejection of Christ crucified, Paul would not put it in such bare terms. He would make some reference to the aspect of the cross or its significance which the dissidents disapproved of. He would point at the very least to the historicity of it and challenge those who did not interpret the event the way he did. That verb in verse 17 is a little woolly, but it conveys Paul's sentiment: I have seen the fact, the veracity, of the cross, it is part of the

wisdom of God, while others are ignoring it, labeling it folly, or have rejected such a thing. C. K. Barrett speaks of the "appraisal" of the cross (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.55), but this is precisely what is missing. There is no discussion *about* the cross, it is the cross itself, Christ having been crucified.

Competing Christs from Scripture

In what sort of scenario do all these observations fit best? It would not seem to be one of radically different proclamations of a recent historical event. According to Acts, Apollos was a man "powerful in his use of the scriptures . . . fervent in the Spirit" (18:24, 25). Such a description suggests that both he and Paul (and many others besides) were going about preaching a Christ derived from the sacred writings. Through inspiration, each man interpreted those writings and cast his picture and doctrine of the Christ according to his own skill and disposition. Those who responded to Paul's opponents in Corinth believed that they had now reached a state of perfection; they were wise in the possession of the Spirit and saw themselves as having already undergone resurrection and entered the kingdom. Theirs was a "wisdom" based on revelation, imparted through the spiritual Christ, a wisdom which itself bestowed salvation. (This is a concept akin to Gnosticism as it flowered at a later date.) To these Corinthian enthusiasts the idea of a crucified Christ meant nothing; it was perhaps even repugnant.

Paul, on the other hand, was a man who could make no positive investment in the present, who could feel no delight in this world. In his reading of the scriptures, as he reminds the Corinthians in 15:3-4, he preferred to focus on passages which he saw as pointing to Christ's suffering on a cross (in the spiritual world) and its redemptive power over sin, on the promise for the future which would be realized only at the End-time (15:21-24). He had, through baptism, died to sin and risen to a new life in Christ, but as for glory and perfection, that would come only when the whole world was transformed at Christ's coming. Thus, his message was eschatological, and centered exclusively on Christ crucified, a concept derived from the writings and a "wisdom" some of his rivals labeled folly.

The picture in 1 Corinthians is the picture of varying interpretations of scripture, of individual experiences of inspiration, of different types of personality. The overriding religious atmosphere of the time was the search for the divine communication of salvation, conferred through an intermediary spiritual entity variously styled the Son, the Logos, Wisdom, the Christ (see Part Two). It was the search for a Savior. Jews and those who attached themselves to Judaism believed that information about this Savior—who operated in the higher world of myth, like all the other savior gods of the day—was imbedded in the Jewish writings. But it was cryptic, it needed decoding.

And not all groups or individuals decoded in the same manner, or arrived at a Savior who had undergone suffering and death. The early Christian record is full of documents which offer a Son without these features: The Epistle of James, the Didache, the Odes of Solomon, the Shepherd of Hermas, many second century apologists. In some cases, such a Son is simply a Revealer. (Q and the Gospel of Thomas also have a Jesus who does not suffer and die, but this is a different case in that it reflects an invented human founder of an (originally) non-cultic nature: see Part Three.)

Those like Paul who were convinced that the word of God came to them through the Spirit declared their own interpretations to be correct. Their message constituted the "wisdom of God." Throughout the first century, apostles from a variety of centers were criss-crossing the empire, winning converts to their gospels, countering the differing messages of their rivals. The Corinthians are free to accept one version or another, as they see fit. All Paul can do is protest, point to his own work and dedication, to his conviction that he had been recommended by God,

to his visions. Nowhere in this picture do Paul or his opponents appeal to the record of the historical Jesus, to any authorized channels going back to Jesus himself—an impossible void in this competitive apostolic world if such a record, such a Jesus, had existed.

A Solution To The First Epistle Of John

Introduction

The puzzle of 1 John, a phrase that has become almost a cliché, is usually presented in terms of the epistle's fundamental incoherence. J. C. O'Neill (*The Puzzle of 1 John*, p.1) declares that "the whole attempt to find a connected train of thought in the Epistle is misplaced. Progression of thought from one paragraph to the next is usually unclear . . ." Different and contradictory ideas are found juxtaposed. Specific themes and terms are concentrated in one section of the letter but nowhere else; or they may occur at widely separated intervals. J. H. Houlden (*The Johannine Epistles*, p.22, 31) has called this epistle "a puzzling work," and suggests that "to try to find a single logical thread . . . is liable to lead to infinite complexity or to despair."

That 1 John is a document which has been "assembled" from multiple sources, or was composed over time by having new elements added to earlier layers, are ideas that have been around for many years, although there are commentators who steadfastly refuse to see any layering at all. My own solution adopts the principle that the epistle was added to over time, but it also benefits from abandoning established preconceptions which are still being applied. I do not attempt to address every detail of the epistle, or even every puzzling element in it (some are mentioned only in passing). Rather, I will concentrate on its broad outlines along with a few key passages, so as to illuminate the evolution of the document and the community's thinking, and to draw implications for an understanding of Christian genesis as a whole.

I will in most cases refer only to the first epistle of John, the longest, most substantial of the three. The third is very short and does not discuss matters of faith. The second is also short but repeats certain points from 1 John. This second epistle must come later than 1 John, or at least later than all but the final stage of it. 2 John will be mentioned only where it adds to or clarifies what 1 John is saying. That all three epistles were written by the Apostle John in the Gospels is no longer seriously held. (Nor is that Apostle any longer thought to be the author of the Fourth Gospel). The author of the Johannine epistles is unknown. The second and third epistles identify the writer as "the Elder," though whether this man wrote any part of the first epistle is not certain. I will also have a few things to say about the Gospel of John.

Those who wish to follow only the core argument of this article, may skip those sections which have a heading preceded by an asterisk.

The Johannine Community

Much has been written about the nature and location of the Johannine community (or perhaps a circle of communities, usually located somewhere in northern Syria) which produced the epistles and the Gospel, for it is recognized that Johannine ideas are often worlds apart from those of the Synoptics. Indeed, scholars often treat this Johannine community as though it were some ancient Shangri-la, a mountain fastness penetrated and converted by some mysterious apostle from Jerusalem, only to shut itself off from the wider world of the Christian movement and evolve in its own unique fashion.

The view of Jesus contained in the Fourth Gospel is unlike any other in the New Testament. When the superficial overlay of the pattern of Jesus' ministry and passion is stripped away—something which, as I analyze it, would have been borrowed at a later stage from some synoptic source and imposed on earlier material about a spiritual Revealer Son—one finds a figure who

bears little relationship to the Jesus of Mark and his redactors, Matthew and Luke, or, for that matter, to the Jesus of Paul. In fact, the Johannine literature is one of the best pieces of evidence we have in support of the theory that Christian ideas grew up independently in many places, and that the movement as a whole did not begin from any one point and figure of origin. This particular set of ideas is headed in the direction of the second century gnostics, so that the Johannine community is often labeled "proto-gnostic."

****A Preliminary Question: Which Came First?***

Before unraveling 1 John itself, one question should be addressed. Which was written first, the epistles or the Gospel? That the former predate the latter should be, even by New Testament standards, a simple and logical conclusion. Yet a great majority of scholars who have examined these documents have opted for the reverse. After examining the question, we will see why this is so.

In theology and doctrinal points, in language and expression, the epistles are more primitive than the Gospel; even those who argue that the Gospel came first acknowledge this impression. In 1 John, not a single Gospel detail is brought in, no teachings are attributed to a human Jesus; there is not even a specific reference to the cross and nothing at all about a resurrection.

Those who argue for the priority of the Gospel view the epistle as an attempt to reestablish more traditional principles in the face of a kind of "runaway" interpretation of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel. Those using the Gospel, so the theory goes, were moving in dangerous directions, specifically toward Gnosticism. Now, it is true that some form of the Gospel of John first surfaces as a favorite of second century gnostics. Consequently, it seems to have been regarded with suspicion by orthodox circles until it was "revamped" around the middle of the century and brought into the ecclesiastical fold. But nowhere in 1 John does the writer allude to such a situation, let alone spell it out. If he is countering a segment of his community which has "misused" the Gospel, how can he fail to refer to that Gospel? How can he avoid pointing to specific features of it in the course of defending a "proper" interpretation of Jesus? Why have the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel simply dropped into a black hole?

One of these, for example, is the Paraclete. This concept is paramount in the Gospel of John: Jesus promises to send, once he is gone, "another to be your Advocate (*parakletos*), who will be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (14:16). This Spirit promised by Jesus will guide believers until he returns. Now, 1 John is a polemical document. It attempts to counter various opponents it labels liars, deniers and Antichrists. In 4:1f it speaks of true and false "spirits" claimed by different factions of the community; those which agree with the writer are "from God," those holding differing views are false. But not only does the author show no knowledge of Jesus' promised Paraclete in all this, he lacks even the fundamental idea that any appeal can be made to traditions of belief or authority going back to Jesus. The world of the epistle writer functions according to current "spirits" claimed from God, nothing more; as such, it conforms to the wider Christian picture we see in Paul, of inspiration from the Spirit. That the author would either be ignorant of or choose to ignore the entire Spirit/Paraclete tradition as recorded in the Gospel, if this was already in existence, is impossible to accept. (Note that the reference to an "advocate" in 1 John 2:1 is not to such a spirit acting on believers, but to Jesus himself interceding with God in heaven.)

On the other hand, the development of the Paraclete tradition embodied in the Gospel can be easily understood as a subsequent solution to the problem of conflicting "spirits" in the community of 1 John. This sort of thing is a universal feature of sectarian activity: problems and disputes are solved by having an authoritative position on them read back into the past, usually at

the beginnings of the sect and embodied in a statement or action by the founder. Many ideas in the Gospel of John can be viewed as attempts to solve problems faced by the earlier community of the epistles.

While the Gospel of John has almost completely abandoned the expectation of an immediate end of the world, the epistle speaks of living in "the last hour" (2:18). The progression from imminent apocalypticism to an acceptance that the church faced a long-term future was a feature of Christian development as the first century passed into the second. Yet we are to believe that the writer of 1 John "returns to a more primitive eschatological awareness" (J. H. Houlden, *The Johannine Epistles*, page 13). Such patterns of regression rarely if ever take place, and no scholar has provided an explanation for why such an anomaly would have occurred here. Certainly, the epistle writer gives no indication that he is reverting to something previously abandoned.

Another equally improbable regression is from Christo-centricity to Theo-centricity. The Gospel, of course, centers on Christ. But in 1 John God occupies center stage, with Jesus a kind of supporting player. It is God "who dwells within us" (3:24). Believers are "God's children" (passim). Knowledge and revelation, imparted through the rite of *chrisma* (evidently an initiation ceremony of anointing) is the gift of "the Holy One," meaning God. It is God who is to appear on the final day, not Jesus. "God is light" (1:5) says the writer, yet he has not a word for Jesus' own declaration: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). The admonition to "love one another" is constantly reiterated in 1 John, yet such a command is said to come from God (2 John 4 and 6 makes this unambiguous), ignoring the many times the Gospel puts such a recommendation into the mouth of Jesus. The concept of Jesus as a teacher is nowhere in evidence in the epistle, even amid references to the idea of Christian teaching. (Which does not preclude the occasional creative translation, such as the NEB's 2:8 and 4:21, where a reference to Christ is not supported in the Greek.) Rather, knowing and keeping the commandments of God is one of the central issues in 1 and 2 John, and only in the Gospel is this turned into the keeping of Jesus' commands. The epistle writer's advice to approach God with requests (5:14) becomes, in the Gospel, Jesus' appeal to ask of God anything "in my name" (16:23, etc.). And so on.

The Christology as a whole is notably more primitive in 1 John, but no one explains how the epistle writer could simply rid his mind of more advanced modes of thinking and expression, nor why he would perceive it as in his interests to do so. If he feels progressive forces have gone too far with the Gospel, he is far more likely to argue for the proper way of interpreting established expressions rather than abandon them altogether as though they never existed.

Does he now disagree that Jesus is the Logos or Word of God, or that this Word was made flesh? Apparently so, for in "recasting" the mighty Prologue to the Gospel, he has discarded the Word and its incarnation, he has dropped the references to pre-existence and creation; and the figure of John the Baptist has mysteriously disappeared as well. Scholars who argue that the Gospel came first acknowledge that the opening of 1 John is "a poor imitation" of the Gospel's Prologue. But the more obvious explanation is that the opening passage of the epistle is the earlier formulation of certain ideas, a focusing on the "message" about eternal life that the community has received by revelation, and that the Gospel represents a later stage, producing a Jesus who was the proclaimer of that message and an incarnation of the Word itself. I will return to the epistle's "prologue" presently.

Finally, the concept that 1 John has been formulated to deal with a crisis over the Gospel would have to suggest that it was composed more or less at once, and by a single writer. Yet this ignores the state in which we find 1 John, and is inconsistent with the widespread observation that it is a layered document put together over time by multiple authors. There is hardly a single compelling argument to be made for the priority of Gospel over epistle.

(The late) Raymond E. Brown, the most prominent Catholic authority on the Johannine writings, bases his decision that the Gospel came first on several arguments (*The Epistles of John*, p.31-3, 97-103), but his bottom line is the observation that the epistles are dealing entirely with an internal dispute in the community, one producing a schism, whereas the Gospel involves a larger conflict with the outside world of the Jewish establishment. He finds it difficult to believe that the schism would not have left its mark on the Gospel, or even that such a rent community could have survived.

Such difficulties, however, are based on preconceptions. As much as 20 years may have passed between the basic layers of the epistle and the creation of the Gospel, and any group surviving the earlier split could have gone on to rejuvenate itself, especially since it would now be the one in possession of the vital new idea sweeping many branches of the Christian movement: that the spiritual Christ had come to earth, "in the flesh." If the earlier community of the epistle is seen essentially as a Jewish sect with a belief in a divine Christ, especially an isolated one, wider conflict is less likely to play a part; but once out into the new arena of belief in the Son as a recent historical man, the stage is reached at which the group will attract the opposition of the mainstream Jewish establishment. In the face of the hostility of the world at large, the issue of any earlier schism at the time of the inception of the historical Jesus idea passes into a murky and perhaps misunderstood or even forgotten past. Besides, it is not clear that the communities producing the epistles and the Gospel stand in sole, direct succession. The relationship, as we shall see, may be more complicated than that.

The claim of priority for the Gospel of John over the epistles may be one of the most misguided conclusions of New Testament research, but the reason for it is easy to see. If the epistles are first and yet lack all sense of the Gospel Jesus, all trace of the sophisticated discourses and high formulations of the "I am" sayings, it then becomes difficult not to conclude that the picture of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel has no historical roots prior to itself, that it is the unique construct of an isolated community, created for that community's needs. For mystic-minded Christians over two millennia, the sayings of Jesus in John have been a life-sustaining treasure, one not easily surrendered as having no likelihood of authenticity. By extension, this picture of a specific kerygma arising out of one group's experience would call into question the authenticity of all pictures of Jesus contained in the Gospels and elsewhere. The total lack of personality and detail about Jesus of Nazareth in the epistles of John, if primary, points to the void to be found in all pre-Gospel circles, a void filled only by the constructions of the evangelists.

1 John: The Prologue

We can now proceed with the dissection of the First Epistle, starting with the so-called Prologue. These opening verses tell of an event which lay at the inception of the sect. Once more we are given an insight into the originating dynamic of Christ belief. Here is the New English Bible version:

"¹It was there from the beginning; we have heard it, we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life. ²This life was made visible (manifested, phaneroo); we have seen it and bear our testimony; we here declare to you the eternal life which dwelt with (literally, was with) the Father and was made visible to us. ³What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And we write this in order that the joy of us all may be complete."

Despite the sonority of the English translation, the quality of the Greek prose is deficient, with grammatical problems. This does not dissuade scholars from seeing this passage as a poetic paean to the ministry of Jesus, spoken by eyewitnesses—or at least represented as such. Nor do they shrink from pronouncing it a distillation from the more famous prologue of the Gospel. But are such views sustainable?

Combining both points in the discussion, we first note that the word for "beginning," *arche*, is not used in the same sense as the Gospel Prologue's "in the beginning was the Word." In the Gospel's hymn to the Logos, *arche* refers to the time before time, before creation, when the divine Word existed with God; this is the doctrine of the pre-existence of the Son. In the opening of the epistle, on the other hand, *arche* refers to the beginnings of the sect. 2:24 (and elsewhere) makes this clear:

"... keep in your hearts that which you heard at the beginning."

That the writer of the epistle would have so adulterated such a lofty thought is hard to believe. Nor can we believe that he would simply have eliminated the ringing concept of Jesus as the Logos, the personified heavenly partner of God. In verse 1, the "word" of life bears no such connotation and has its traditional meaning of "message about." Again we meet the ubiquitous "*phaneroo*," to reveal, manifest, give evidence of. The writer is speaking poetically of the revealed message about eternal life: he speaks of it being made visible, seen by the eyes, heard and felt with the hands. To make this a reference to those who witnessed Jesus' ministry and even touched his person is more than faintly silly; nowhere in the epistle does the writer appeal to such things and besides, the pronoun used to refer to what was seen, heard and touched is neuter, something impersonal. Similarly, it is the "eternal life" which "dwelt with" the Father, not a Son or personal entity. The writer is speaking of doctrinal beliefs, not a human man.

What we have in this opening paragraph is the account of an event of revelation, or perhaps a longer process symbolized as a single event, a moment when certain people believed that they were receiving evidence of the offering of eternal life. As the Prologue in its present form expresses it (verse 3), that offering is envisioned as coming through the Son, Jesus Christ.

The Witness to the Son

Let's compare the sentiments of the Prologue with an important passage in chapter 5:

"⁶This is he who came (or, has come) through water and blood: Jesus Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood, and the Spirit is the one bearing witness, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three who bear witness, ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three are in agreement. ⁹We accept the witness of men, but the witness of God is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given concerning his Son. ¹⁰He who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart, but he who disbelieves God makes him out to be a liar, by refusing to accept God's own witness to his Son. ¹¹And this is the witness: that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is found in his Son. ¹²He who possesses the Son has that life; he who does not possess the Son of God has not that life." (From the NEB translation, with slight changes in the direction of the literal Greek.)

Much ink has been spilled over the interpretation of elements in this passage, particularly verses 6 to 8. First, we must note that the overall effect is devoid of any sense of a life of Jesus. It is the witness of God which provides belief in the Son, and the fact that the Son is the channel to eternal life. There is a total silence on any ministry of Jesus and his personal teachings about

himself and about eternal life. (If the Gospel had preceded the epistle, it is inconceivable that Jesus' own witness to these things would not be appealed to here.)

We should also note that the writer does not present us with the necessity to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, or any other human man, *was* the Son. Nor are any historical events appealed to in support of such a proposition. God's witness concerns the *fact* of the Son and the eternal life which is derived from belief in such a figure, not to any identity he had nor deed he had performed.

This does not prevent commentators from suggesting that "water" and "blood" are to be interpreted as cryptic references to Jesus' baptism and crucifixion (e.g., R. E. Brown, J. H. Houlden). But there is a much less strained explanation for these terms. Though their exact significance is lost to us today (Houlden labels them "enigmatic"), they show all the signs of referring to sacramental or mystical elements within the community's beliefs and practices, through which knowledge of, or benefits from, the Son are perceived to flow. The author points to the three elements of Spirit, water and blood as belonging to a common category: all three "bear witness," all three are "in agreement." Since Spirit clearly belongs to the realm of revelation, it follows that water and blood are also, at least in part, revelatory channels. All three are presented as part of the witness of God, and God works through revelation. It is too great an anomaly to have the first refer to the manifestation of the prophetic voice and the latter two refer back to supposed events in the life of the Gospel Jesus, a story studiously ignored throughout the epistle.

Besides, how does Christ "come" through the events of his baptism and crucifixion? (This is a little too cryptic even by Johannine standards.) But if we take the verb (which is really an aorist participle: "the one having come") as a reference to the coming of the spiritual Christ into the world through his manifestation in God's revelation—which is a common mode of expression in the New Testament epistles (see Part Two)—then verse 6 is essentially saying that Jesus Christ has been revealed through the rites (?) of water and blood. These are likely some form of purification ritual and a sacred meal. Together with the general activity of the Spirit, which is one of the community's hallmarks (see 4:1f), such things constitute God's witness. God has revealed the Son and the availability of eternal life through him.

The writer of this passage, as of the Prologue, moves in a milieu of divine revelation, not of the preservation of the teachings and deeds of a recent historical man. As we shall see further, the whole concept of apostolic tradition going back to a Jesus is missing from this epistle, as are any Apostles themselves. Note that 9a is simply a comparative to 9b, a general rule, saying: "We are in the habit of accepting testimony from men, so how much more should we accept testimony from God?" Certainly, apostolic testimony is not included in the witnesses enumerated in the previous verses, nor does it appear anywhere else.

We might also note that the writer in verse 6 makes a point of stressing that the "blood" must be included, with the clear implication that others are resisting its inclusion. This precludes it being a reference to an historical crucifixion, for who would deny such an event or its central significance? (The issue of docetism is nowhere in evidence in this letter, despite some scholars' attempts to introduce it: see below.) If, however, the term relates to a rite that reflects a later layer of theological development about the spiritual Son (which we shall see), we are again looking at an entirely inspirational situation, a scene of revelation on a stage which lacks any central character of Jesus of Nazareth.

This absence of any historical Jesus at the sect's beginnings is strikingly clear in 2:27:

"The anointing which you received from him (God) stays with you; you need no other teacher, but you learn all you need to know from his anointing."

This anointing (*chrisma*) seems to be an initiation rite for entry into the sect, and no Christian writer who knew of a teaching Jesus, or who possessed any information whatever derived from him through oral or apostolic tradition, could possibly have said such a thing.

Now that we have established that this is a sect which relies entirely on mystical revelation, we can go back to the opening Prologue and read the sentence which follows it:

"Here is the message we heard from him and pass on to you: that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all." (1:5)

This fundamental truth about God, which is one of the core beliefs of the Johannine community, is thus to be seen as something which has been imparted by revelation. The "from him" may refer either to God or the spiritual Son (commentators are split as to its antecedent). But that it refers to the teaching of Jesus in a ministry on earth cannot be supported. Nor does the Gospel of John contain any such saying; rather, there Jesus says that *he* is the light. The latter is the more advanced idea, assigning qualities originally belonging to God to the intermediary figure, and is a further pointer to the priority of epistle over Gospel.

Layers in 1 John

We must now go on to the question of strata in 1 John and how the epistle was put together. Some scholars (e.g., Houlden, *op.cit.*, O'Neill, *op.cit.*, Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*) have concluded that the epistle is not a unity, but that it reflects more than one stage of thinking and conflict within the community. Much of chapter 4 and parts of 5 are the product of a later stage, and even within the first three chapters sentences have been inserted which do not fit their context.

As part of the argument for stratification in 1 John, we will bring in the question of what were the views of the dissidents who are attacked in the letter as liars and antichrists, and whether they are the same throughout the epistle. At least some of these dissidents (the ones in chapter 2) have stomped off to operate independently of the writer's group.

As examples of insertions which stick out like proverbial sore thumbs, consider these:

". . . and we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus his Son" (1:7d).

"He (Jesus Christ) is himself the propitiation for our sins, not our sins only but the sins of all the world" (2:2).

Such sentiments clash with ideas found in adjoining sentences. In 1:9, the earlier layer told readers that "if we confess our sins, he (God) is just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong." At this earlier stage, the Son was apparently not perceived as involved in forgiving sin. 2:1 presents a Jesus in heaven "pleading our cause with the Father," but as an advocate, not as a blood propitiation. This is not the only anomaly on the subject of sinfulness. At several points, the writer seems to hold the view that the true child of God is without sin, that he is incapable of it (as in 3:9); yet at others he speaks of forgiveness for sins committed, as in 2:1, and even cautions that claims to sinlessness are "self-deception" (1:8).

Two prominent references to Christ in the epistle also seem to interrupt the flow and context:

"Whoever claims to be dwelling in him (God) ought to conduct himself as Christ (ekeinos) did (literally, ought to walk as Christ himself walked)" (2:6).

"It is by this we know what love is: that Christ (ekeinos) laid down his life for us" (3:16).

Both disturb the flow of passages which speak of the believer's relationship to God or to his fellow sect member. (More on both these verses later.) Christ seems to have been added as an enlargement on the basic ideas, the later feature of an editor who views Christ as a good example of the points the previous writer was making, in which no Son was mentioned.

In passing, we can note that in both passages quoted above, as well as several others, Christ is referred to obliquely by the pronoun "*ekeinos*," meaning "that one". This is peculiar, and no one has provided a convincing explanation for it. My own instinct is that it began as a way of referring to a specific part of God, that emanation of him which served as intermediary; in other words, the spiritual Son. It has an impersonal character out of keeping with the idea of a recent historical person or distinct human personality. This is one of the characteristics of this epistle, that there often seems to be no sharp distinction between God and Christ, a curiosity encountered in other New Testament epistles.

But we need to define the strata in 1 John more broadly. There seems to be a progression in nature and degree concerning the involvement of the Son / Jesus Christ in the topics under discussion, and it would make sense to see in this a reflection of the evolution of ideas about him, perhaps over the course of a few decades (though we really have no way of judging the length of time).

The latest stage (which probably included some evolution in itself) would comprise those views which speak of "cleansing by his blood" (1:7d), "a propitiation for our sins" (2:2 and 4:10), the Son "who appeared to undo the Devil's work" (3:8b). It would have begun with the idea that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (4:2) and include the verses looked at above, that Christ had conducted himself in a certain way which was exemplary, and had "laid down his life" in some fashion. Strangely, this is never specified as crucifixion, nor does a resurrection ever appear in the ideas of those who contributed to this letter.

When we move back beyond this latest stage we find the letter reverting to less specific ideas about the Son, ideas which do not involve sacrifice or incarnation. To clarify the distinction between these two levels, we can compare the dissidents who are spoken of in chapter 2 with those in chapter 4.

Two Sets of Dissidents

Let's look at the ones in chapter 4 first:

"¹But do not trust any and every spirit, my friends; test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for among those who have gone out into the world there are many prophets falsely inspired. ²This is how we may recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges (confesses) that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit which does not thus acknowledge Jesus is not from God. . ." (From the NEB translation)

Here the dissidents are called "prophets falsely inspired." They are moved by "spirits" which do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. (To "confess" is to declare an article of faith.)

Let's examine this "false inspiration" for a moment. In trying to understand what could possibly be meant here, scholars often raise the specter of docetism, the early second century "heresy" which stated that Christ had not been a real flesh and blood human being but only one who seemed to be such. But of docetism there is no suggestion here. The issue is not phrased in these terms, and none of the arguments for or against this doctrine are ever alluded to, something unlikely if the writer is contesting such a position. At the very least we would expect him to make some general reference here to the human life of Jesus; but he does not.

Nor is there any suggestion that the dissidents are renegades rejecting a long-held view, such as would be the case with docetists. Rather, they simply do not confess the belief the writer holds. These dissidents are rivals, not apostates. We cannot even be sure that a schism is involved here. It may simply be a case of competing congregations holding differing views.

Another thing to note is that "Jesus Christ" in the writer's mind cannot simply equal "Jesus of Nazareth," since this would make the statement a tautology: "Jesus of Nazareth (a flesh and blood person) has come in the flesh." As phrased, the Jesus Christ this writer has in mind must be the spiritual Son, the pre-existent divine figure in heaven. This is his starting point. He is making a statement about his heavenly Christ: that he has come in the flesh. In other words, he has been incarnated, simply that. The writer seems to be telling us that some Christians are going about claiming that the heavenly Jesus Christ was *not* incarnated.

Even more startling, in 4:5 the writer reveals that to these deniers of the incarnation "the world listens." In 2 John 7-11, we can see that some Christian circles welcome such "deceivers" into their houses and give them greeting. How could such a radical rejection of traditional belief and history itself gain this kind of hearing?

What's more, this incarnation which the writer believes in: how is it known? Does he appeal to historical memory, to authorized channels going back to Jesus? How could he fail to support his position by making at least a passing reference to the record of the past, to apostolic tradition and the human witness to Jesus of Nazareth? Instead, the doctrine that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is the product of true spirits from God, namely revelation; while those who deny such a doctrine are laboring under false spirits which the writer labels "antichrist" (4:4). It would seem that the belief in Jesus' incarnation had nothing to do with verifiable history or established tradition. For competing views of the "truth" this is a level playing field.

Now consider the dissidents who are attacked in chapter 2, the "antichrists" who "went out from our company" (2:19):

"²⁰You, no less than they, are among the initiated; this is the gift of the Holy One, and by it you have all knowledge . . . ²²Who is the liar? Who but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist, for he denies both the Father and the Son . . ." (NEB)

These people deny "that Jesus is the Christ" (*hoti Iesous ouk estin ho Christos*). Again, we must consider what this means. The traditional interpretation has usually been: Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, a statement about an historical situation. But there are serious problems with this proposed meaning.

First, the present tense is used, not a past one, which certainly to our minds would be the natural, even unavoidable mode of expression. (Not even the scholars who interpret the phrase this way

are able to avoid it.) Again, there is no drawing on Gospel details or apostolic tradition to make a defence of the statement.

But the insurmountable objection is this: these "deniers," like the later ones mentioned above, still seem to be part of the wider Christian community. "You no less than they are among the initiated," says the writer in 2:20. Another level playing field. But how can this be? The bottom line for inclusion in a Christian sect would surely have to be belief in the proposition that Jesus had been the Christ. Such deniers would no longer be Christians. In fact, 2:22's "Who is the liar?" implies that these very opponents had accused the *writer's* group of being liars, to which the writer has retorted that *they* are the liars. What Christian group could be accused of "lying" by another Christian group for declaring that Jesus of Nazareth had been the Messiah?

If it were claimed that the dissident group no longer regards itself as Christian, this would mean that they had simply abandoned their faith, and the whole issue would have taken on a different significance for the writer. They would be apostates, cast out and no longer even to be bothered with. But the writer blames them for leaving (2:19). The tone he adopts—including calling them "antichrists"—is that they are now a rival group with opposing views. They have begged to differ from his doctrine, not abandoned something which an entire movement has held for over half a century. No matter how you look at it, "Jesus is the Christ" cannot mean "Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah."

Before unraveling this puzzle, we can note that the dispute involved here cannot be the same as the one addressed in chapter 4. Here there is no mention of any issue about "coming in the flesh," nor is there concern over true and false spirits. Moreover, the two are incompatible, especially if given the conventional interpretations. It is not uncommon to find a commentator seeing docetism as involved in chapter 4 and the denial of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah in chapter 2. Yet how can the same group which earlier has rejected the historical Jesus as being the Christ go on to concern themselves over whether this non-Christ was a real human being?

What, then, is the meaning of 2:22? The declaration that "Jesus is the Christ" has the ring of a confession of the type we meet in Romans 10:8-9:

"This means the word of faith which we proclaim. If on your lips is the confession, Jesus (is) Lord . . . then you will find salvation."

Paul places such a declaration entirely in the realm of present faith, not history. We can compare it to the confession of emperor worship that "Caesar is Lord." Here Caesar is an established given, as is "Jesus" for Paul. Both statements are a confession made toward a given figure, not a claim about someone in the past. Paul acknowledges that "Jesus is the Lord of us," as the Romans do of Caesar, whoever he may currently be. Either declaration has the effect of addressing itself directly to the divinity, as if to say: "You are Lord!"

In the same way, the phrase in 1 John 2:22 declares that Jesus, a given spiritual figure and Son of God, is the Anointed One, the Messiah of God's promise (a declaration which would not have fitted popular Jewish conception). The term "Messiah" in this period had taken on a wealth of emotional connotation over and above its traditional significance, and this included the meaning of "Savior." And so we might compare the phrase to the modern declaration "Jesus Saves." In the milieu of this early layer of 1 John, we can expand its significance to this: "I believe in a Jesus who is the Son of God (see also 4:15) and our Anointed Savior." Compare this with 3:23, "to have faith in the name of his Son Jesus Christ," which is another way of saying that the believer acknowledges him and his power. The issue in the earlier schism, then, boils down to whether such a being exists or not.

In fact, the writer goes on in 2:23-25 to enlarge on this very meaning, that the dispute is over the existence of the Son:

"To deny the Son is to be without the Father; to acknowledge the Son is to have the Father too . . . you will yourselves dwell in the Son and also in the Father."

Not only do we get the sense here that the writer is speaking of two divine personages in heaven, he is stating the core of his group's religious faith. It is simple "Christ belief." That there is a Son, that he is the avenue to the Father, both for knowledge and for intercession. To dwell in one is to dwell in the other. As 5:1 phrases it, "He who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God." This is the bottom-line feature of the "Christ" movement: the existence of the Anointed Son, the intermediary channel to a transcendent God, the avenue of salvation. For such sects, the Christ is not a human End-time ruler, but a divine entity, pre-existent with God in heaven. Without him, humanity does not reach God. This 'Jewish' sectarian version of the Son is a reflection of the benchmark belief of the Hellenistic age.

Christian and Pre-Christian Strata

Now we can address the puzzling question I asked about this earlier stage of the letter. How can there be a faction which declares both the Father and the Son indispensable, and a faction which apparently denies the very existence of the Son—and yet both claim to be legitimate representatives of the sect, both claim to be holding to the truth and call the other faction "liars"?

Both groups have passed through the rite referred to as "*chrisma*." This "anointing by the Holy One" (i.e., God) is the mark of membership in the sect, no doubt from the beginning. Through it, God has imparted "all knowledge" (2:20), "all you need to know" (2:27). Both groups underwent it, and both are currently appealing to it. It follows, then, that the doctrine that "Jesus is the Christ" cannot have been part of the "knowledge" laid out at the anointing. If it were, the writer's group could hardly be called liars for upholding it, and the dissidents could hardly maintain that they were "still among the initiated" if they had rejected it. The actions of the dissidents imply that the writer's group, by declaring "Jesus is the Christ," have gone beyond the anointing and the doctrines embodied in it.

The only deduction that can be made here is that the original expression of the sect did not entail the faith declaration embodied in "Jesus is the Christ." In other words, the sect originally *did not have a Son*. This is further implied, as we have seen, by the little diatribe the writer directs at the dissidents in 2:23: "To deny the Son is to be without the Father; to acknowledge the Son is to have the Father too."

Is this possible? Let's try to look at the first part of the epistle in a different light. If we take 1:1 to 2:17 as a block (which it is), we find that with the exception of a few phrases, the thought is entirely theocentric. The focus is firmly upon God; he is the channel of eternal life (1:2), he is the "light" (1:5). With him, believers walk in the light (1:7a); his are the commands they are exhorted to keep (2:3-4). In verses 2:12-14, which are usually translated as a series of metrical lines, since they have a distinct poetic style, there is not a word about Christ: sins are forgiven for God's sake; readers know him who has been from the beginning, namely God; "God's word is in you." Mastery over Satan is the central ethical concern. If we remove from our block the four references to Christ, three of which, as we have seen, have the air of insertions since they are recognized to clash with their contexts, we are left with an extended passage which hangs together in style and content: at the beginning eternal life was revealed to be "in the Father," we can walk in the same light as he does, we know him by obeying his commands, by loving our brothers, by mastering the evil one, by rejecting the godless world.

In such a picture, the references to Christ are totally incidental and often inconsistent with surrounding statements: 1:7d, 2:1b, 2:2, 2:6. We can even include 1:3c, near the end of the Prologue: "(that life which we share with the Father) *and his Son Jesus Christ*," for it too has the air of an addendum. The Prologue up to that point has made no mention of the Son; indeed, he is notably missing in the core phrase of the Prologue: "We here declare to you the eternal life which was in the Father and was revealed to us." For a document which is so concerned about those who deny the Son, there is precious little about him in this entire opening declaration.

So what do we have here? We have an initial stratum which is entirely Jewish; pre-Christian. It is a type of Judaism tinged with dualism, of the kind found at Qumran, but also elsewhere, ultimately going back to Persian ideas: light vs. darkness, truth vs. error. The concept that "God is light" suggests Hellenistic Jewish circles. There are children of God and children of the Devil. This is a sect which is detached from the outside world: a world evil, godless and hostile.

In this picture the Son is an afterthought and quite unnecessary. He is a new idea grafted on in patchwork fashion, imperfectly integrated with earlier ideas. 2:1b views him as an advocate in heaven. The latter part of chapter 2 declares that one can reach and have the Father only through the Son. All this is a reflection of the basic function of the Son as an intermediary to a transcendent God. In a later third layer, as reflected in 1:7d and 2:2, that function takes on a dramatic turn: the Son is now a propitiation for sins, cleansing them by his blood; this is within the new context of the Son having come in the flesh (4:2), an article of faith known through the Spirit. Dwelling in God has also come to be measured by a new standard: conducting oneself as Christ himself had done (2:6). This latter verse is extremely vague and likely a late addition.

Other parts of the epistle mirror the same mix of elements. The initial pre-Christian stratum, with no Son, survives in 2:28-3:2 which speaks of God's anticipated appearance at the Parousia, not Jesus'. We are God's children and when he arrives we shall be like him. In 3:9f criteria are offered for determining who is a child of God and who a child of the devil. Readers are exhorted to approach God with confidence, to "obtain from him whatever we ask" (3:21-22).

Within such passages, insertions about the Son create a disjointed and detouring effect. The necessity to give allegiance to the Son (e.g., 3:23) comes from the next stage of thinking, for such necessity is lacking in other passages which discuss the believer's relationship with God. Among the insertions from the third stage are 3:3 and 5, 3:8b, and the famous 3:16. This declaration, "that Christ laid down his life for us and we in turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers," is painfully out of place here, for the text goes on in verse 17 to descend with a dull thud from this lofty idea to the remark that if a man has enough to live on he should give to a brother in need. This latter verse, in its tone and motifs, follows logically from verses 14 and 15. Some scholars (Houlden, *op.cit.*, p.100 and Grayston, *op.cit.*, p.113) have recognized the unhappy sequence of ideas here and perhaps need to be more courageous in their implication that 3:16 may have been lacking in the original text.

The Schism

But let's return to the picture of schism contained in the early part of the letter, between the forces of the original stage 1 and those of stage 2. It now becomes clear. A great dispute has arisen between those who adhere to the initial Jewish outlook from the sect's beginnings, a faith based entirely on God, and those who reflect the new development in religious thinking which was permeating fields far beyond the sect's own: the existence of the intermediary Son. The writer's group is convinced that the Son is the avenue to the Father; to be without him is to be without the Father. Both groups claim to be legitimate representatives of the sect, but the group holding to the traditional views have "gone out," since they cannot accept the new doctrine.

It might be objected that the "progressive" group would be on shaky ground if they were pushing a view which was not part of the original "knowledge" bestowed by the rite of anointing, if it was not part of the doctrine revealed "from the beginning." But that it did not go back to the beginning is suggested by the very fact that the writer does not specifically make such a claim in support of his position. 2:24 does not really fill this bill, for it is too allusive:

"If you keep in your hearts that which you heard at the beginning . . . (then) you will dwell in the Son and also in the Father."

Aside from the fact that what was heard is not spelled out, the point is not presented as an argument to prove the group's position against their opponents. Rather, it is a kind of 'consolation' statement, confirming that what was heard will enable the reader to dwell in the Son and Father and receive the promised eternal life. 3:11 actually states the message (or at least part of it) which was heard at the beginning: "that we should love one another." The fact that the writer does not similarly state that the doctrine of the Son was part of the original message is telling.

I suspect that what is happening here is that he is "reading back" the subsequent development of belief in an Anointed Son into the revelation spoken of in the Prologue and finding a general support for it there. Even when he goes on to speak of what has been learned at the initiation, he remains notably unspecific. There must have been little if anything of real substance for the writer to appeal to in support of his side of the schism which the community has just suffered.

This in itself would lead us to consider that the phrase in 1:3c linking the "Son Jesus Christ" to the Father is an addition to the initial version of the epistle's Prologue, by someone who subsequently chose to see the Son as implied in the sect's original revelation. Such a practice of reading later ideas into earlier writings and of constantly updating those writings was anything but unusual in the documentary history of Christianity.

A further objection might be made over the term "antichrist" (2:18, 4:3). If the doctrine of the Son is relatively new, at least in its acceptance by a formal group within the community, how can the writer speak as though the antichrist (meaning the one destined to be against the Messiah) was a traditional part of the congregation's expectations? But the idea of a "man of lawlessness," an agent of Satan (or Satan himself), was indeed longstanding in Jewish apocalyptic expectation, a figure who would oppose God's work and that of his Messiah at the End-time establishment of the Kingdom. The writer may be recasting him in a new application to the spiritual Christ and Son, with a new name. In fact, there is no record of the term "antichrist" before 1 John, and scholarship generally regards the term as invented by the writer of this epistle or the group he represents.

The End of the Epistle

A curious effect is created by the concluding section of the epistle. Following the dramatic dispute of the third layer over whether Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:1f), the rest of the letter gradually loses sight of it and the final block from 5:13 to the end reverts entirely to the middle stratum. Here ideas of incarnation and propitiation are definitely lacking. The sentiment returns to "giving allegiance to the Son of God" and to the idea that the Son keeps the true child of God safe from the evil one. A key verse is 5:20:

"We know that the Son of God has (is) come and given us understanding to know him who is real; indeed we are in him who is real, since we are in his Son Jesus Christ."

Here the role of the Son is the classic one of Revealer. He gives understanding to know God ("him who is real"). The verb "has come" is in the present tense in the Greek, implying an ongoing condition. There is no sense here of the declaration in 4:2, which is in the perfect, that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. The Son is simply the newly-revealed channel to God, which represents the fundamental inceptive stage of Christ belief. It is this revelation of God which confers eternal life, the hallmark of the Johannine community's soteriology (concept of salvation) throughout all the stages of its documentation.

Thus, in this one little disordered jumble of an epistle, we can discern the fundamental course of early Christian development. We can trace one group's progression through the ascent which the spiritual Christ followed from soil to full flowering. When this sect was formed, it was without a Son. God himself revealed that he was light, that people could become his children and gain eternal life by withdrawing from the world, obeying his commands and loving one another. No doubt the sect expected that the arrival of the Kingdom would not be long in coming. At some point, the idea that God had a divine Son who served as the mediator of this revelation, and thus the avenue to salvation, took hold and crystallized in the minds of some portion of the community, to be vigorously resisted by others. Such an idea may have been the result of outside influences and it could well have filtered in over time, discussed and studied by certain members of the sect until it reached a point of critical mass, to divide the community in schism.

Further on down the road, the group which had adopted the new Son came to believe that he had been incarnated, that he had "come in the flesh," and whether at this point or a little later (I suspect it was later), this coming in flesh entailed the idea that he had died as a sacrifice for sins. Now a new schism (if the two sides in chapter 4 are from the same community) resulted with those who resisted the idea of incarnation. The community still views Jesus as the revealer of God, it maintains the concepts of stage two, but it has added the extra dimension of a propitiatory sacrifice in a life lived "in flesh."

How much this idea of a life "lived" and "laid down for others" was assigned to a specific point in history is impossible to say, since no historical allusions are ever made. I suspect it was still indeterminate, to solidify into recent history only when the next stage was reached: the Gospel of John. I have not addressed the possibility that the "in flesh" (*en sarki*) of 4:2 still inhabits the mythical arena seen in Paul and other early epistles, rather than an actual incarnation to earth. The effect, however, would be little different.

2 John is also a product of the later stratum, for it too concerns the schism over whether "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (verse 7). Here the writer warns his readers not to receive into their houses those who do not stand by ("dwell in") this "doctrine about the Christ." 3 John, while it specifies no doctrine, is almost certainly concerned with the same schism.

****From Epistle to Gospel***

As Jesus speaks about himself in the Gospel of John, he represents a personification of the second stratum of 1 John. This is a revealer Son, though he has attracted to himself some of the attributes given to God in the epistle: "I am the light of the world." Jesus personifies the knowledge of God that comes from God: "I am the bread of life." No one can come to the Father except through Jesus, the Son.

As in the middle stratum of 1 John, salvation is achieved by receiving and accepting the knowledge about God and about his revealer, Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he die, shall live." The Gospel of John has no teachings beyond Jesus' proclamation about himself, for he has nothing else to say. He is the Son, the light, eternal

life, the living bread, the living water, the door of the sheepfold; he is the one come down from heaven, he is the revealer of the Father. There are no ethics. To "love one another" is little more than an in-house rule, not a universal moral dictum; 11:35 shows that he is simply advocating love among his followers, so that "all will know that you are my disciples." Those disciples are part of an elect, an idea which emerges regularly, as in 13:1 and 17:6: "I have made thy name known to the men whom thou didst give me out of the world." There is little sense of a universal salvation.

Indeed, Jesus' ministry amounts to little more than standing up in the marketplace or in the synagogue and declaring to all the world the most mystical, pretentious pronouncements about himself. But they become acceptable if we view such declarations as going back to the theology of earlier groups about the object of their worship: the mythical and mystical Son and Word, something which was a purely spiritual entity, the mediatorial channel to God. It is only when they are placed in the mouth of a human Jesus walking through Palestine that they take on this air of unreality, this ludicrous megalomania.

These passages in the Gospel of John which contain the "teachings," Jesus' self-declarations, have long been recognized as a distinct layer of material. Scholars have always struggled to see this Johannine interpretation of Jesus as a later development, imposed on traditions about the historical figure which are more like those of the synoptic Gospels. But I would suggest that the situation is the reverse. The distinctive Johannine material, in some form, would once have stood alone. It represented an earlier phase of the community's faith, a faith based on belief in God's revelation, in knowledge transmitted through the spiritual Son. In other words, the "teachings" were once the community's pronouncements about the intermediary Son as a Revealer entity. (We see them in an incipient state in the middle layer of 1 John, and we can compare them with sentiments in documents like the Odes of Solomon: see Article No. 4.)

Under the influence of synoptic ideas which came to it from outside, the Johannine community eventually jumped onto the new historical Jesus bandwagon. The Gospel of John borrowed its historical dimensions from elsewhere. The miracles were taken from a distinct source which is somehow related to, though not identical with, Mark's miracle collection (scholars call it the "Signs Source"). Part of their function in the Gospel is to provide some proof for the claims Jesus makes about himself.

The evangelist also needed to give the community its own special link back to the new historical founder, and so he invented the Beloved Disciple, a figure later identified with Mark's apostle John. Any sign of such a figure is lacking in the Johannine epistles.

The movements in Jesus' ministry have also been superimposed, but the editor here either did not care or did not possess the abilities of a Mark to create the sense of an ordered narrative. Jesus wanders back and forth without purpose between Galilee and Jerusalem. There is none of the synoptic pattern which creates a sense of evolution to the ministry, none of the ascending tension as Jesus makes his way inexorably toward Jerusalem and his fate. John's ministry is simply a loose structure on which to hang the pronouncements of Jesus as the channel to God, the vehicle of salvation through proper belief.

The Johannine concept of salvation required notable cuts to the synoptic picture. Jesus could not be represented as redeeming through his death and resurrection, and so there is no Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel, no establishment of a sacrificial rite at a Last Supper. The passage regularly pointed to as "embodying eucharistic teaching," 6:51-58, does no such thing. When Jesus styles himself the living bread, the bread of life, and declares that to possess eternal life one must eat his flesh and drink his blood, this is in no way connected with his death. This is not sacrificed

blood, not slain flesh. In fact, the flesh and blood of these verses (51c-56) are an enlargement on the previous metaphor of bread alone, and remain within its parameters: they are additional symbols representing the ingestion of divine knowledge, imparted through the person of Jesus. The idea is tied full circle by verse 58: "This is the bread that came down from heaven." The evangelist has introduced these elements, but he has kept them in the service of the basic Johannine soteriology: salvation through revelation, through Jesus as a Revealer figure, not a sacrificial one. (Some Johannine scholars, such as R. E. Brown [*The Epistles of John*, p.98], suggest that there are "minor indications" of a sacrificial and vicarious view of Jesus' death, but these are far from stating an atonement doctrine and can be otherwise interpreted, as Brown himself points out [n.227].)

This is not to say that the terms of the metaphor itself, flesh and blood, were not derived from that source in which they did signify elements of a sacrifice: the irresistible story of Jesus of Nazareth created by the synoptic evangelists, whose primary feature was the sacrificial Christ of the Pauline cult. At some point the Johannine community with its spiritual Revealer Son had come in contact with the Markan Jesus and found itself compelled to incorporate him. But it was determined to do so on its own terms.

That determination is nowhere so evident as in the handling of Jesus' passion and death. There is no doctrine in John about atonement for sin or any redemptive consequence to Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus is not even allowed to suffer. (Not even emotionally: there is no Gethsemane scene in John.) His raising up on the cross is an "ascension," a glorification (12:23). It is the ultimate support for the proof of his claims, the ultimate miracle. Jesus is in control throughout the trial and crucifixion, bearing all in sublime detachment, fulfilling what must be "accomplished" by the will of his Father. Note that John refuses to introduce Simon of Cyrene, declaring that Jesus "carried his own cross" (19:17), nor does Jesus utter the desolate cry on the cross put into his mouth by Mark.

John also presents the crucifixion as a "lifting up" of the Son into full view of the world, so that they can see him and believe. "This Son of Man must be lifted up as the serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness, so that everyone who has faith in him may in him possess eternal life" (3:14-15). And notice how the evangelist deftly avoids any idea of atonement in these references to Jesus' death: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life" (3:16). Or, "There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends" (15:13). If John had any sympathy for the concept of the Atonement, this is where he would have expressed it. (Note that the last saying is not offered in any context about Jesus' death.) The strata of Johannine Revealer and synoptic Crucified One have not been integrated.

Having analyzed the Gospel of John, in one of its main aspects, as a kind of personification of the middle stratum of 1 John, a presentation of Jesus as a Revealer Son rather than a sacrificial atoner, what then do we make of the fact that the Gospel fails to reflect any of the content from the final layer of the epistle, those insertions which specify Jesus as a propitiation for sin? In fact, as I have pointed out, the Gospel seems to have gone out of its way to avoid such an idea. And yet it is not likely that the evangelist would have discarded such a doctrine if it was an established part of his own community's thinking. Does this compromise the seemingly compelling argument made earlier that the epistle must precede the Gospel?

The solution lies in a principle which constantly rears its head in the study of early Christianity, one scholars have come increasingly to realize: that relationships between strands of thinking, between documents and communities, are far more complex and subtle than can be understood and conveyed by any academic presentation from the vantage point of our time. Judith Lieu has

expressed the view (*The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, p.16-21) that "the Epistles imply more than one community owing some loyalty to the Johannine tradition," and that "both the Gospel and First Epistle are the outcome of a lengthy process of development within Johannine thought." Noting also that a few recent scholars have started to swing away from the position that 1 John grew out of the Gospel, she suggests that Epistle and Gospel may be to some extent independent, each separately "crystallizing out of Johannine traditions in different circumstances."

We must conclude that the Gospel does not simply stand in direct line from the final version of 1 John. It may be the product of a parallel community, with a different set of emphases. It may be that the very latest parts of the first epistle overlap the earliest phase of the Gospel, and almost certain that references to Jesus' blood sacrifice are derived from a different line of thinking than that of the evangelist. (I have been referring to the author of John in the singular, but in reality the Gospel seems to have gone through a number of stages of evolution before reaching its canonical form, perhaps as many as five in the view of Helmut Koester ["History and Development of Mark's Gospel" in *Colloquy on New Testament Studies*, ed. B. Corley, p.63].) The Gospel builds upon the ideas of the epistle, but at what stage of the latter is anything but sure. Nor can we be certain even that the evangelist had the epistle in hand, for the problems the epistle reflects would have been common to the community as a whole, and many of its ideas and expressions the property of the entire Johannine circle. Certainly, 3 John suggests a picture of multiple congregations spanning more than one geographical center.

Who Crucified Jesus?

A Two-Edged Sword

In the first Gospel story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, the author of Mark engages in a carefully crafted and delicate balancing act over the question of responsibility for Jesus' death: between Jew and Roman, between the Jewish religious establishment and the secular arm of the Empire. Mark knew full well that only the Roman governor could condemn a man to the cross, but he also wanted to allot to the Jewish leaders and to the Jewish people as a whole an equal if not greater role in Jesus' execution.

And so throughout his story Mark set the scene by having the chief priests, scribes and elders plot to do away with Jesus, and it is their forces who first arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane. He invented a follower of Jesus, Judas by name to symbolize all Jewry, who betrays Jesus to his enemies and leads the arresting force to him. And it is the High Priest and Sanhedrin who first question Jesus and abuse him, finding him guilty of blasphemy and deserving of death—on grounds which have never made much sense. Indeed, the entire circumstances of Mark's trial before the Jewish Council can be seen to contravene so many known conventions and prohibitions that some scholars have been led to reject its very historicity. But that's a story for another time.

When Jesus is finally turned over to the Roman governor, Mark makes Pilate behave in a manner which is entirely uncharacteristic of what we know of him from historical sources, and of Roman policy in general. By whitewashing Pilate, by having the demands of the Jewish leaders and Jewish people override his attempts to free Jesus, by having the crowd choose Barabbas over Jesus (an option no governor of Judea would ever have offered, and there is no record of such a Roman policy anywhere), Mark places the primary responsibility for Jesus' death at the feet of the Jews.

When Pilate finally washes his hands of the affair, official Roman brutality takes over, and Jesus is further abused, scourged and finally crucified. But the Jews immediately reenter the picture in the jeers of the spectators at the foot of the cross, and their obstinate unbelief is contrasted with the Roman centurion who declares in an act of faith that "truly this man was the Son of God." Finally, Mark brings God himself into the picture to hide the sun's face behind a blackened sky, and to repudiate his treacherous people by rending the very veil of his own holy sanctuary. Mark thus set the course for the Jews' wretched fate at the hands of Christians and the Christian church for the next two millennia, and Matthew would seal its ferocity with the most heinous line of fiction ever penned: "His blood be upon us and upon our children!"

Such is the picture of Jesus' death presented in the Gospels: the unjust execution of an innocent man, beset by betrayal and false accusations and a pitiless establishment. Its lurid details should have been indelibly branded into the mind of every Christian preacher and writer, every convert to the new faith. Instead, there is scarcely a murmur of it until Mark—drawing on a multitude of scriptural passages and an old literary formula found throughout centuries of Jewish writing, known as the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One—sits down to pen his tale, a good half century or more after it all supposedly took place.

A Sweet Sacrifice

Amid all the references to Jesus' sacrificial death in Paul and the other first century epistle writers, we get not a single detail of the vivid trial and crucifixion story portrayed in the Gospels. Beyond two passing references we will presently examine, none of its rich panoply of characters appear, none of its memorable places, nor any of its horrifying litany of abuse and torture. The words of Jesus on the cross are never quoted, while the response of the universe to his passing goes unrecorded by anyone.

Indeed, a figure like Pilate, who delivered this innocent Jesus up to scourging and execution, seems far from Paul's mind when he says (Romans 13:3-4) in a general defense of the secular authority: "Rulers hold no terrors for them who do right . . . (the ruler) is the minister of God for your own good."

In Romans 8:32 he extols the magnanimity of God who "did not spare his own son but delivered him up for us all." And for the writer of Ephesians (5:2), it is Christ himself who in love "delivered himself up on your behalf as an offering and a sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God." (Note that the word usually translated "arrested" or "betrayed" in 1 Corinthians 11:23 is literally "to deliver up" which, as we can see above, implies no necessary Gospel setting: see Part Two of the Main Articles.) Wherever Paul and the other epistle writers of the first century envisioned this sacrifice as having taken place, it seems far from the dread hill of Golgotha and the expression of God's dark wrath toward the towering sin of deicide.

The Jews "Who Killed the Lord Jesus"

What then are we to make of the passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, about the Jews "who killed the Lord Jesus"? Well, many scholars (e.g., Mack, Koester, Pearson, Meeks, Perkins, Brandon: see the Bibliography at end) have tended to make short work of it, dismissing it as an interpolation by some later editor or copyist. They do so on two grounds.

One is what they consider to be an unmistakable allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in verse 16, an event which happened after Paul's death. Here is the passage in its entirety, courtesy of the New English Bible:

"¹⁴You [referring to the Christians of Thessalonica] have fared like the congregations in Judea, God's people in Christ Jesus. You have been treated by your countrymen as they are treated by the Jews, ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, the Jews who are heedless of God's will and enemies of their fellow-men, ¹⁶hindering us from speaking to the gentiles to lead them to salvation. All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all."

This finality of God's wrath must refer to an event on the scale of the first Jewish War (66-70), when the Temple and much of Jerusalem were destroyed, not, as is sometimes claimed (e.g., by R. E. Brown), to the expulsion of Jews from Rome (apparently for messianic agitation) by Claudius in the 40s. This gleeful, apocalyptic statement is hardly to be applied to a local event which the Thessalonians may or may not have been aware of several years later. Besides, Paul's reference in verse 14 (which many take as the end of the genuine passage) is to a persecution by Jews in Judea, and even the killing of Jesus was the responsibility of Jews in that location. Offering a local event in Rome as a punishment for either crime seems somehow inappropriate. There are also those who question whether any such persecution of Christians took place prior to 70 (see Douglas Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According*

to *St. Matthew*, p.30ff.), indicating that perhaps even verse 14 is part of the interpolation, by someone who had little knowledge of the conditions in Judea at the time of Paul's letter. (Pearson, below, suggests this.)

It has been pointed out that there are no different textual traditions of 1 Thessalonians without the disputed passage. Since this is so, it is claimed, the insertion would have to have been made very early (soon after 70), when there would hardly have been enough time for the evolution from the mythical to the historical Jesus phase. But this is an unfounded assumption. Recently (see *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, Epp and MacRae, eds., 1989, p.207f.) some scholars have abandoned the old idea that the first corpus of Pauline letters was assembled no later than the year 90. They now see such a collection as coming around the time of Marcion in the 140s. Even though a few individual letters, like Romans and the two Corinthians, do seem to have been known by the turn of the century to people like Ignatius, the first witness to the epistle 1 Thessalonians in the wider Christian record (beyond the writer who used it to compose 2 Thessalonians, probably in that city) comes no earlier than that first corpus.

Thus the interpolation in 2:15-16 could have been made considerably later than 70. Even into the second century, Christian anti-Semitism remained high and the catastrophic events of the first Jewish War were very much alive in the memories of both Jew and gentile in the eastern empire. The inserted passage could have been made in the letter's own community, before it entered the corpus. It is even barely conceivable that verse 16 refers to the outcome of the second Jewish Revolt (132-5), when Bar Kochba was crushed, Jews were expelled from Palestine, and a Roman city was built over the ruins of Jerusalem.

The second reason scholars tend to reject this passage as not genuine to Paul is because it does not concur with what Paul elsewhere says about his fellow countrymen, whom he expects will in the end be converted to Christ. The vicious sentiments in these verses is recognized as an example of "gentile anti-Judaism" and "foreign to Paul's theology that 'all Israel will be saved'." (See Birger Pearson: "1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 [1971], p.79-94, a thorough consideration of the question.)

We might also note that in Romans 11, within a passage in which he speaks of the guilt of the Jews for failing to heed the message about the Christ, Paul refers to Elijah's words in 1 Kings, about the (largely unfounded) accusation that the Jews have habitually killed the prophets sent from God. Here Paul breathes not a whisper about any responsibility on the part of the Jews for the ultimate atrocity of the killing of the Son of God himself. This would be an inconceivable silence if the 2:15-16 passage in 1 Thessalonians were genuine and the basis of the accusation true.

Crucified Under Pontius Pilate

If the one reference in the New Testament epistles to the guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus can reasonably be rejected as a later insertion, what about the other side of the coin of responsibility? The sole reference to Pontius Pilate in the canonical correspondence comes in 1 Timothy 6:13, and every scholar who recognizes that the three Pastoral epistles are not by Paul dates them no earlier than the beginning of the second century. Can we possibly imagine that the man who executed their founder and divinity would immediately sink from the consciousness of Christian letter writers for some three-quarters of a century, that all the references to Jesus' death in Paul would contain not a hint of him, nor of the trial process he presided over?

Even in 1 Timothy, some commentators have found reason to question the integrity of the reference to Pilate, since there are problems in seeing it as appropriate to the context. But since

this epistle is late, when conceivably it could reflect the beginnings of the idea that Jesus had been crucified by Pilate (it is at least no earlier than the time of Ignatius, who is the first Christian writer outside the Gospels to mention Pilate's name), the question is not critical, and I will place the arguments in favor of interpolation for 1 Timothy 6:13 in an Appendix at the end of this article. Personally, I support interpolation since the Pastorals as a whole contain strong indications that their writer is still unfamiliar with an historical Jesus.

The Rulers of This Age

If both references to the Gospel agents of Jesus' crucifixion are to be discounted (these are the only passages in all the epistles I would claim as interpolations, plus one or two other 'possibles'), how then does the early record deal with the circumstances and responsibility concerning the death of the Son of God? Who does Paul identify as having slain Christ? Let's look at 1 Corinthians 2:6-8:

"⁶And yet I do speak of a wisdom for those who are mature, not a wisdom of this passing age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. ⁷I speak of God's secret wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and predestined by God for our glory before time began. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

A great amount of scholarly ink has been spilled over the meaning of "the rulers of this age" (*ton archonton tou aionos toutou*, verses 6 and 8). In both pagan and Jewish parlance, the word *archontes* could be used to refer to earthly rulers and those in authority (as in Romans 13:3). But it is also, along with several others like it, a technical term for the spirit forces, the "powers and authorities" who rule the lowest level of the heavenly world and who exercise authority over the events and fate (usually cruel) of the earth, its nations and individuals. That invisible powers, mostly evil, were at work behind earthly phenomena was a widely held belief in Hellenistic times, including among Jews, and it was shared by Christianity. J. H. Charlesworth (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p.66) puts it this way:

"Earth is full of demons. Humanity is plagued by them. Almost all misfortunes are because of demons: sickness, drought, death and especially humanity's weaknesses about remaining faithful to the covenant (with God). The region between heaven and earth seems to be almost cluttered by demons and angels; humanity is often seen as a pawn, helpless in the face of such cosmic forces."

There has not been a universal scholarly consensus on what Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 2:8, but over the last century a majority of commentators (see below), some reluctantly, have decided that he is referring to the demon spirits. The term *aion*, "age," or sometimes in the plural "ages," was in a religious and apocalyptic context a reference to the present age of the world, in the sense of all recorded history, since the next age was the one after the Parousia when God's Kingdom would be established. One of the governing ideas of the period was that the world to the present point had been under the control of the evil angels and spirit powers, and that the coming of the Kingdom would see their long awaited overthrow. Humanity was engaged in a war against the demons, and one of the strongest appeals of the Hellenistic salvation cults was their promise of divine aid in this war on a personal level.

Thus, "rulers of this age" should not be seen as referring to the current secular authorities who happen to be in power in present political circumstances. Rather, Paul envisions that those in the present age who have controlled the earth and separated it from heaven, the evil angelic powers,

are approaching their time of "passing away" (2:6). They did not understand God's purposes, namely their own destruction, when they inadvertently crucified "the Lord of glory."

Ephesians 3:9-10 echoes these hidden purposes of God, and declares that they have now been brought to light:

"⁹ . . . the application of this mystery which has been hidden for long ages in God the creator of the universe, ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavens, in accordance with his eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Here the rulers are clearly identified as the ones in heaven. And we might note that the writer is consistent with general Pauline expression in allotting the task of revealing God's long-hidden mystery to the "church," to men like himself, not to any recent historical Jesus. That last phrase refers to the workings of Christ in the higher spiritual world, his redeeming actions within God's eternal realm and time. In other words, the world of myth.

A prominent first century Christian idea was that Christ by his death had subjected all the spirit powers and authorities, both good and bad, to his control. In this light, Colossians 2:15 again places Jesus' crucifixion in a spiritual milieu, for it is difficult to see any historical scene on Calvary contained in this idea:

"On the cross he discarded the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public spectacle of them and led them as captives in his triumphal procession."

Ephesians 6:12 also speaks of the fight which is not against human foes, but against the "cosmic powers, authorities and potentates of this dark world, the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens." These were even thought of as having political organizations like rulers on earth. They were certainly well placed and capable of executing a spiritual Christ who had descended from the higher divine realm into their territory, and we will look in a moment at a document which paints this picture of the Son descending from heaven to be crucified by the evil angels.

Scholars who balk at this interpretation of Paul's words and declare that he simply means the earthly powers which the Gospels specify (e.g., Anchor Bible, p.164), are bucking even ancient opinion. Ignatius uses the term *archon* in a thoroughly angelic sense (Smyrneans 6:1). Origen regarded the *archonton* of 2:8 as evil spiritual beings, and so did the gnostic Marcion.

Modern scholars like C. K. Barrett (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.72), Paula Fredriksen (*From Jesus to Christ*, p.56), and Jean Hering (*The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p.16-17, a brief but penetrating analysis), have felt constrained to agree. Delling in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (I, p.489) notes that the spirit rulers are portrayed by Paul as "treating the Lord of glory as prey in ignorance of the divine plan for salvation." They operated in the spiritual realm, which S. Salmond (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Ephesians, p.284) describes as "supra-terrestrial but sub-celestial regions." Paul Ellingworth, *A Translator's Handbook for 1 Corinthians*, p.46, states: "A majority of scholars think that supernatural powers are intended here."

S. G. F. Brandon (*History, Time and Deity*, p.167) unflinchingly declares that although Paul's statement "may seem on cursory reading to refer to the Crucifixion as an historical event. . . the expression 'rulers of this age' does not mean the Roman and Jewish authorities. Instead, it denotes the daemonic powers who . . . were believed to inhabit the planets (the celestial spheres)

and control the destinies of men. . . . Paul attributes the Crucifixion not to Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders, but to these planetary powers."

However, Brandon (like everyone else) fails to address the question of how Paul could have spoken in such terms if he had the tradition of Jesus' recent death in Judea before his eyes, providing not so much as a hint of qualification to this supernatural picture. It will not do to suggest that since earthly rulers are considered to be controlled by heavenly ones, the latter are seen as operating "through" the former. Paul would not likely have presented things in this way without an explanation. And once we get to the Gospel picture which first makes a clear reference to earthly rulers in the death of Jesus, any heavenly dimension which supposedly lies behind those rulers completely disappears.

Descending Gods

The concept that a god, in order to perform a salvific act, had to approach or even enter the "world of flesh" was arrived at by philosophical reasoning. In the higher celestial spheres where deity was perfect and unsullied by any contact with matter and the world of humans, gods existed in their fully divine state. There they could certainly not do something as human as to suffer. Pain, blood, death: these were the unfortunate features of the lower, baser levels of the universe.

To undergo such things, the god had to come down to humanity's territory. He had to take on material characteristics and capacities. If contact between flesh and divinity was to be made, the initiative lay with the god. Deity had to pity its unfortunate, fallen creation. It had to humble itself, compromise its spiritual purity. It had to descend. And descend it did, for the concept of the "descending redeemer" seems to have been a pervasive idea during this era, though the evidence for the pre-Christian period is patchy and much debated.

The ancient mind at the turn of the era saw the universe as multi-layered. Under the influence of Platonism, there was first of all a dualistic division between the lower material world where humans lived, and the higher, spiritual world where divinity dwelled. The former was only a transient, imperfect copy of the latter. Spiritual processes and the activity of gods in the higher realm had their corresponding effects on the world below. Paul thus lived at a time when the world of matter was viewed as only one dimension of reality, the observable half of a larger integrated whole whose other, invisible, half was referred to as the "genuine" reality, accessible to the intellect.

But most views of the universe also saw a division of the upper world into several levels—usually seven, based on the known planets. As a deity descended from the higher reaches of pure spirit, he passed through ever degenerating levels of the heavens, and took on an increasing likeness to lower, material forms as well as an ability to suffer fleshly fates, such as pain and death. The first level of the spirit world was the air, or "firmament," between the earth and the moon. This was the domain of the demon spirits—in Jewish parlance, of Satan and his evil angels—and it was regarded as closely connected to the earthly sphere. The demonic spiritual powers belonged to the realm of flesh (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VII, p.128) and they were thought of as in some way corporeal, though they possessed 'heavenly' versions of earthly bodies (*Ibid.*, p.143).

Thus it was wholly conceivable for Paul's savior deity in that spiritual world to descend into the realm of the demon spirits. Here he would be in the sphere of flesh, which fits the early writers' almost universal use of such stereotyped phrases as "in flesh," "according to the flesh." (C. K. Barrett translates *kata sarka* in Romans 1:3 as "in the sphere of the flesh." See his *Epistle to the*

Romans, p.20; compare C. E. B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans*, p.60.) Here Christ possessed or could assume counterpart characteristics to those of the visible world; he could undergo suffering and death at the hands of the spirits as a blood sacrifice, and be raised by God back to the highest heaven. Even if it was all a part of God's "mystery," something that had taken place in God's eternal time, hidden for long generations and knowable to men like Paul only through divine revelation in scripture (as in *Romans* 16:25-27, *Ephesians* 3:5, etc.).

Such ideas were not restricted to Judaism and Christianity, although the few surviving writers who touch on the Greek mysteries and the activities of their deities tend to be sophisticated philosophers like Plutarch and Sallustius. These men saw the stories of the Greek salvation cults as "eternal meanings clothed in myths." They were "allegorical interpretations" only, even if the minds of "ordinary men" saw them as more literal. (Some of those average devotees of the cults may also have retained a more traditional way of viewing the myths of the savior gods as belonging to a primordial past on earth.)

The fourth century Sallustius regarded the story of Attis as "an eternal cosmic process, not an isolated event of the past" (*On Gods and the World*, 9). His mentor, the "Apostate" emperor Julian, describes (in *Orations* V, 165) Attis' descent to the lowest spirit level prior to matter, undergoing his death by castration to give the visible world order and fruitfulness; but he regards this as a symbol of the annual cycle of agricultural rebirth, the generative power which descends into the earth from the upper regions of the stars.

Myths of the descent and ascent of deity are often interpreted (especially in gnosticism and neoplatonism) as symbolizing the ancient idea of the fall of the soul into matter, its suffering and death within that base, imperfect world, followed by a reascent into its proper abode and state, an exaltation. The myth of the redeeming god, the paradigm for the soul's descent and ascent, guarantees this destiny for the believer.

There are clear echoes of such thinking in Paul (e.g., *Romans* 6:5). And the earliest uncoverable layers of Christian cultic mythology, such as the christological hymn found in *Philippians* 2:6-11, often allude to such a paradigmatic "descent and suffering leading to exaltation":

"For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature (or form) of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross. Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven, on earth, and in the depths—and every tongue confess, 'Jesus Christ is Lord', to the glory of God the Father." (*The NEB translation*)

This pre-Pauline hymn is the early Christian epitome of the descending-ascending redeemer myth, and there is not a breath of identification with any Jesus of Nazareth. Three times does the hymn allude to the idea that this divinity took on a likeness to base, material form, but never does it say that he became an actual man, much less give him a life on earth. Instead, this deity descends to undergo death (some commentators, such as Norman Perrin, Dennis C. Duling in *The New Testament: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., p.61, feel that the phrase "death on a cross" is probably a Pauline addition, since it interrupts the pattern of the poetic lines) and is raised back to the highest heaven, where he is exalted. Note, by the way, that this divinity is given the name "Jesus" only after his exaltation following death, indicating that the hymnist knew of no previous life on earth under that name. (The term "Lord" is a title, not a name.)

The shorter hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16 offers a similar descent-ascent pattern performed by a divine being:

"He who was manifested in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels; was proclaimed among the nations, believed in throughout the world, glorified in high heaven."

Once again there is no identification with a human man, and any suggestion of a ministry is pointedly lacking. This deity seems to have been seen only by angels and engaged in no proclaiming of his own. The "in flesh" of the first line (*en sarki*) can be translated "in the sphere of the flesh," as noted above.

However, no Christian writer or hymnist expresses the view that the Christ myth is allegorical or symbolic. Paul seems to have very much believed in the divine Jesus' literal suffering at the hands of the demon spirits.

The Descent of the Son

In a Jewish/Christian piece of writing called the Ascension of Isaiah we can find corroboration for the picture of a divine Son who descends into the lower reaches of the heavens to be crucified by the demon spirits. This document falls into two sections which were originally independent. The second section, the Vision of Isaiah (chapters 6-11), underwent its own evolution before being combined with the first, and it contains a detailed picture of the descent-ascent motif we have been discussing.

This is a difficult document to analyze in any exact fashion, since the several surviving manuscripts differ considerably in wording, phrases and even whole sections. It has been subjected to much editing in a complicated and uncertain pattern of revision. But a couple of passages seem to indicate that in its earlier layers the Vision speaks only of a divine Son who operates entirely in the spiritual realm. The community that wrote this, probably toward the end of the first century, lived in a world of apocalyptic expectation and revelation from the Holy Spirit (6:6f). Salvation is expected for the righteous elect, who will be exalted as a consequence of the death and exaltation of the Son. Isaiah is granted a vision, in which he ascends through the seven heavens of a layered universe and receives a view of God and his Beloved, also called the Chosen One and Christ. He learns that this Son is to descend to the lower world, where he will be killed and rise, rescuing the souls of the righteous dead from Sheol as he reascends to the highest heaven.

Here is the key passage. The seer and his angelic guide have reached the seventh heaven. There they see the Lord, the Christ, and the angel foretells this to Isaiah (9:13-17):

"¹³The Lord will descend into the world in the last days, he who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form, and they will think that he is flesh and a man. ¹⁴And the god of that world will stretch out his hand against the Son, and they will lay their hands upon him and hang him upon a tree, not knowing who he is. ¹⁵And thus his descent, as you will see, will be concealed from the heavens, so that it will not be known who he is. ¹⁶And when he has plundered the angel of death, he will rise on the third day and will remain in the world for 545 days. ¹⁷And then many of the righteous will ascend with him."

This looks like a fleshing out of the implication behind Paul's reference to the crucifixion in 1 Corinthians 2:8. We have the descent of the Son through the layers of heaven, a taking on of the "likeness" of men. "They will think that he is flesh and a man" clearly implies that he is not.

There is no suggestion of Jesus of Nazareth here. Nor is it likely to be a reference to docetism (Christ having an earthly body which only "seems" human), since the phrase looks to be related to the idea in verses 14 and 15 that his *identity* has been concealed. Nor is the Gospel trial and execution anywhere in sight in the reference to the hanging upon a tree. Rather, this hanging is something performed by "the god of that world," meaning Satan. (Some manuscripts read: "*he* will hang him upon a tree.") Though it is set "in the last days" (Jewish apocalyptic writers tend not to be so Platonically strict), the entire thing has the ring of a mythological scene.

To undergo this fate, the Son has entered the firmament (the "air" between the earth and the moon) where Satan and his evil angels dwell. At the beginning of his ascent (7:9-12), Isaiah has passed through the firmament where he saw Satan and his warring angels, a struggle, his guide tells him, which "will last until the one comes whom you are to see, and he will destroy him." As in 1 Corinthians 2:8 and Colossians 2:15, one of the Son's principal tasks will be the conquest of the demon spirits.

Verse 14 tells us that those who do the hanging do not know who this Son is. Once again, this would not seem to be a Gospel reference to Romans or Jews, but means the evil angels of the firmament, for verse 15 indicates that it is the layers of heaven where the concealment and the ignorance about the Son's identity lie. This ignorance on the part of the "god of that world" is similar to that of the "rulers of this age" who unwittingly crucify the Lord of Glory in 1 Corinthians 2:8.

Thus the crucifixion is something perpetrated by the supernatural powers and takes place in the spiritual world. The reference to rising on the third day and remaining for 545 days is, in the opinion of M. Knibb, the translator and commentator on the Ascension of Isaiah in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (II, p.143f.), a later addition to the text based on gnostic sources which believed that Jesus remained on earth after his resurrection for 18 months (p.170, n.'v'). Other bits and pieces throughout the Vision are the reworkings of editors, so that it is difficult to uncover and differentiate the various strands. Knibb even voices the possibility (p.170, n.'g') that all entries of the names Jesus and Christ are later additions.

As part of Isaiah's vision (10:8-14), the Father gives instructions to the Son about his coming descent into the lower world and his ascent to the seventh heaven. There is nothing in this divine directive which speaks of an incarnation into flesh and earthly history, nothing of a ministry, nothing of a death at the hands of humans. There is not a whisper of any knowledge of the Gospels. The Son's activities seem to relate entirely to the spirit realm, layers of heaven extending through the firmament and including Sheol. God's instructions focus on how he is to proceed through these heavenly spheres, and on the task of destroying the power of Satan and the evil spirits.

When Mark came to write his midrashic tale about a Jesus on earth, the war by heaven and the Son against the demons was translated into Jesus' war on earth against the new, humanized demons: the Jews. Just as the "rulers of this age," the evil spirits, were the murderers of Christ in the Pauline phase, the earthly Jews became the Christ-killers in the Gospel version, an allegory which very quickly got turned into history.

Christ Reaches Earth

Simplistically put, there are three types of surviving manuscripts of the Ascension of Isaiah: Ethiopic, second Latin, and Slavonic. The first is thought to be based on one Greek text, the other two on a different Greek text. There are notable differences between the Ethiopic on the

one hand, and the second Latin and Slavonic on the other. Also, the latter pair include only the second section of the work, chapters 6 to 11, which is the part we are concerned with.

In the Ethiopic text we encounter an unusual passage in 11:2-22, not a word of which appears in the other two. It recounts (as part of Isaiah's vision of the future) first the birth of the Lord to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. This passage agrees with no Gospel Nativity scene. Here Jesus is born in his parents' house, to a Mary who has not been forewarned of who this infant is. Lacking any details concerning Herod, magi, census, manger, shepherds, etc., it would seem to be an early, more primitive formulation of a birth story. The passage goes on to make bare reference to the great signs and miracles the adult Jesus performed in Israel, how the children of Israel turned against him, how he was handed over to the "ruler" (Knibb presumes that this must be Pilate) to be crucified, and how he descended to the angel in Sheol. It then concludes (verse 20): "In Jerusalem, I saw how they crucified him on a tree, and how after the third day he rose and remained (many) days. And I saw when he sent out the twelve disciples and ascended."

Knibb (*op.cit.*, p.154) remarks that "the primitive character of this narrative makes it difficult to believe that it did not form part of the original text." Elsewhere (p.146), he suggests that the Greek text on which the second Latin and Slavonic manuscripts were based was a "revision" of the one on which the Ethiopic was based, and that the 11:2-22 passage had been cut from the latter because of its "legendary features." But this would not seem to make much sense. Why would a "reviser" choose to delete such a key passage, the only one in the Vision which has anything to say about Jesus' life on earth? And why would such details be seen as "legendary," implying that they were undesirable? If they seemed primitive to a later editor, experience has always shown that when a Christian copyist or redactor does not like something, he changes it to make it conform to current outlook. Rarely does he drop it altogether—or reduce it to a phrase, such as is found at that point in the other versions.

An earlier scholar of the Ascension, R. H. Charles, also regarded 11:2-22 as part of the original text, but he did so the basis of preconception. Since chapter 9, he says, "leads us to expect a definite portrayal of these events in a vision," (i.e., crucifixion, descent into Sheol, resurrection on the third day), 11:2-22 fulfills this expectation (*The Ascension of Isaiah*, 1900, p.xxii). Of course, such an expectation is based on the assumptions of the Gospels.

Would not a better explanation be that the Latin and Slavonic texts are earlier, and that the Greek text behind the Ethiopic has enlarged upon an earlier Greek version lying behind the others? Even within the Ethiopic text of 11:2-22, we can detect signs of incremental expansion and revision. For example, in 11:21, in referring to how long Christ remained on earth after rising, different manuscripts in the Ethiopic have varying lengths of time, one being "forty days," no doubt under the influence of Acts. In general, the Ethiopic seems to show expansions on more primitive passages in the other two.

I would argue that the Ascension of Isaiah may reveal an evolution from a spiritual Christ operating in a supernatural setting, to a physical Christ living a life in an earthly setting. A document is being periodically revised (by multiple redactors in different versions) to reflect new developments in thought and doctrine, even if not every detail is always brought up to date. The Ethiopic manuscripts can contain a brief account of Jesus' life on earth and yet not have descriptions of the Son's descent enlarged to include an earthly dimension. Perhaps it was felt to be implicit—as some modern scholars would assume.

Appendix

Is the Reference to Pilate in 1 Timothy 6:13 an Interpolation?

1 Timothy 6:12-14 reads ("Paul" addressing "Timothy"):

"¹²Run the great race of faith and take hold of eternal life. For to this you were called and you confessed your faith nobly before many witnesses. ¹³Now in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Jesus Christ, [who himself made the same noble confession and gave his testimony to it before Pontius Pilate,] ¹⁴I charge you to obey your orders irreproachably and without fault until our Lord Jesus Christ appears."

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (called "the Pastoral Epistles") were written in Paul's name so as to claim the authority of that famous apostle for the views the writer is advocating. Most critical scholars date them between 100 and 125. They can be a product neither of Paul nor of his time. As J. L. Houlden says (*The Pastoral Epistles*, p.18): "Neither in vocabulary and literary techniques nor in atmosphere and teachings is it plausible to suppose that these writings come from the same pen as the main body of Paul's letters." The Pastorals reflect the beginnings of a church system which only came into existence around the beginning of the second century: a bishop, supported by a group of elders and deacons. As well, all sense of immediate expectation of the Parousia has passed. The church is becoming acclimatized to the world and a future.

Timothy's confession of faith before many witnesses (verse 12) is interpreted as referring to one of two possible occasions: either the baptismal ceremony upon his conversion to the faith, or his ordination as a minister. Commentators usually choose the former, since baptism is the more likely event at which one is "called to eternal life." The sacrament was publicly administered before the congregation, providing the "many witnesses" referred to. Timothy is confessing his faith before God and fellow Christians. The content of that statement of faith no doubt had to do with a belief in Christ.

The way the reference to Pilate is introduced into the text (the clause in square brackets above) shows that it is intended as a parallel to Timothy's confession in the previous sentence. But there is much to be concerned about in this assumption. (See J. H. Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.100-1; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.143.) Jesus' situation on trial before Pilate is not the same as Timothy's at his baptism, or even his ordination. Timothy's confession is before God and friendly witnesses; Jesus' is not, and it puts Pilate in parallel to God, which is at best inappropriate, at worst irreverent. Jesus' declaration before Pilate is presumably a statement about himself, which is an awkward equivalent to the believer's declaration of faith in Jesus. With all of these difficult features in such a comparison, one might wonder what would have led the original writer to think of making it.

Commentators discount the possibility that the occasion of Timothy's confession was before a magistrate, when he might have been on trial for his Christian beliefs. No such event, from which the writer could have drawn, appears in the genuine Pauline letters. Besides, such a trial would hardly be called a summons to eternal life. However, we must consider the possibility that a later scribe may have misinterpreted things in this way. Perhaps by some time further into the second century a tradition had grown up that Timothy had in fact been prosecuted for his faith. This may have prompted such a scribe to insert the idea that, just as Timothy had declared before hostile magistrates his faith that Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah, Christ himself before a hostile Pilate had declared these things about himself. Such an editor may have felt that while "God" (in verse 13) had a qualifying phrase, "who gives life to all things," something was

lacking after "and of Jesus Christ," and the comparison with Jesus' trial was what came into his mind.

It has also been pointed out that in the account of the trial before Pilate in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus barely says anything, maintaining a stoic silence. His simple agreement, "It is as you say," in answer to the question "Are you the king of the Jews?" is hardly a "noble confession" to inspire such a comment as we find in 1 Timothy 6:13. However, John, when he came to revise the synoptic passion story, had Jesus engage in a dramatic debate with the Roman governor, which might well have been the source of the comment. Since attestation for the Gospel of John is lacking during the period to which the Pastorals are usually assigned, this would suggest that the clause is indeed an interpolation from a later point in the century, when John was more widely known. The Pastorals are not included in the earliest corpus of the Pauline letters, so the fact that there is no manuscript evidence of the letter without this reference to Pilate does not pose a problem.

Moreover, only a few verses later (6:16), when speaking of God, the epistle makes this sweeping statement: "No man has ever seen or ever can see him." If the man Jesus of Nazareth had recently been on earth, standing before Pilate, a man who had in fact seen and come from God, one would not expect the writer to have said such a thing—at least without some qualification.

The possibility of interpolation is supported by something suspicious which occurs a few verses earlier. In six places in the Pastoral letters the writer uses the phrase "wholesome teaching." In five of these, there is no indication of the source of such teaching. In fact, the first time the phrase appears, in 1 Timothy 1:10, the writer (speaking as Paul) says that such teaching "conforms with the gospel entrusted to me, the gospel which tells of the glory of God." This pointedly ignores any identification of Jesus as the source of the teaching.

But in 1 Timothy 6:3 an unexpected phrase intrudes:

"If anyone . . . teaches differently and does not agree with wholesome words—those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and with pious teaching, I call him puffed up and ignorant."

The phrase "those of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*tois tou kuriou hemon Iesou Christou*) has the look of a scribal notation originally made in the margin which later got inserted into the text. (This was a common occurrence in the transmission of ancient manuscripts.) If it were part of the original writer's text, the word "those" (*tois*) would have been redundant and would not likely have been written. Rather, it conveys the impression of an afterthought. The whole thing seems carelessly done, because the insertion fails to cover the succeeding phrase, "and with pious teaching," which we would expect to find identified with Jesus as well.

(Note that taken by itself, the passage in 6:3 is not required to be an interpolation in order to maintain that the Pastorals know no historical Jesus. Even if *tois tou kuriou hemon Iesou Christou* is part of the original text, it need imply no more than that the "teaching" is considered to be revealed through the spiritual Christ, in much the same sense as Paul's "words of the Lord." Most gods were regarded as "teaching.")

We have here a very likely interpolation made some time after the letter was written, and it occurs just a few verses before another phrase, the one about Pilate, which seems similarly out of place. It is admittedly in my own interest to regard the reference to Pontius Pilate in 1 Timothy 6:13 as a possible interpolation, but there are clearly good reasons for doing so.

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These are some of the scholars who have pronounced 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 an interpolation:

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The Odes Of Solomon

Introduction

The long-lost Odes of Solomon were discovered by J. Rendel Harris in 1909 among a pile of old Syriac manuscripts which had been brought to England from the Middle East and tossed onto shelves in a corner of his office. The manuscript's opening leaves were gone, and of the 42 Odes in the set, Nos. 1 and 2 were missing. No. 2 still is. But No. 1 was already known from a gnostic document in Coptic, in which it had been placed in the mouth of "Mary, mother of Jesus."

The Odes were almost certainly composed in Syriac, probably in the latter part of the first century, and very likely in northern Syria, i.e., Antioch, Edessa, or some nearby center. Their tone is predominantly Jewish, though with seeming Christian overtones which are tantalizing and frustratingly obscure. The Odes show mildly gnostic features as well, and a long debate has sounded over whether they belong in this line of development. There are many parallels in terms and ideas with the Gospel of John, but direct dependence on that work has been discounted; instead a "shared community" is suggested, though not necessarily in precisely the same location or at the same time. Even greater are the parallels with certain of the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the Thanksgiving Hymns, and the Odes as a whole are clearly modeled on the Davidic Psalms.

From the beginning, the controversy surrounding the Odes, and one of the focuses of their study, has been on the question of how they should be categorized. Are they Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Johannine? Scholars with an orthodox view of Christian origins and development have attempted to align them with their own outlook. The problem is, the Odes do not conform to mainstream Judaism (there is nothing about the Temple cult or the Mosaic Law in them), and they refuse to yield up any but the vaguest of Christian references, and then only under duress. I would suggest that if one brings a fresh, unprejudiced eye to these poems, one will uncover valuable insights into the nature and diversity of early Christianity, the types of belief that were developing in different sectarian communities, where the light of the Gospels had not yet arrived to cast its artificial and distorting glare over the new landscape.

The first thing that strikes one on reading the Odes of Solomon is, quite simply, their poetic beauty. They are unlike almost anything else one encounters in Jewish and Christian literature of the time. No other piece of writing comes close to their joyous, unclouded atmosphere. Absent is the dark, punitive fever of end-of-the-world prophecy. No blood of sacrifice, no oppressive moral injunction, no rancorous sectarian attitude mars the purity and grace of their expression. Their quiet ecstasy, their sacred eroticism, is the voice of the mystic, though it is impossible to say if the same person wrote them all. Poetically, the writer was inspired by the Davidic Psalms, but by none of their plaintive supplication and lamentation. His Odes bask in a warm and optimistic light.

The Great Debate

Here is Ode No. 1, one of the shortest; others extend to as much as 26 verses. In my quotations I am going to take the occasional liberty of leavening the recent (1985) translation of J. H. Charlesworth in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (edited by J. H. Charlesworth), volume 2, page 735f, with that of the team of Rendel Harris and Alphonse Mingana who published a thorough study of the Odes in 1920 (*The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*). Neither the usual division of a verse into two lines (sometimes three), nor the numbering of the verses appears in the manuscript.

**1 The Lord is upon my head like a crown,
and I shall never be without him.**

**2 Plaited for me is the crown of truth,
and it caused your branches to blossom in me.**

3 For it is not like a withered crown that does not bud:

**4 But you live upon my head,
and you have blossomed upon me.**

**5 Your fruits are full and complete;
they are full of your salvation.**

As soon as they were published, the debate began. What were these Odes and who wrote them? The prominent German scholar Adolf Harnack pronounced them a Jewish hymnbook later interpolated by a Christian, and although he subsequently changed his mind under the influence of other studies, their pervasive Jewish tone and content still persuades some scholars in this direction. Suggestions that they represent some form of second century gnosticism are now out of favor. James H. Charlesworth, perhaps the leading specialist in the Odes of Solomon today, and a scholar whose theological views can best be described as "traditional," declares them unreservedly Christian. He calls for support on J. A. Emerton, who "considers the debate closed: 'The Odes are plainly Christian in their present form.' " (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, page 727. I will henceforth abbreviate this publication and volume to *OTP*.)

Charlesworth manages to find in the imagery of the Odes all sorts of allusions to Jesus of Nazareth. He sees in them a "rejoicing over and experiencing of a resurrected and living Messiah, Lord and Savior." (*OTP*, p.728) But can an unbiased eye discern the same thing?

First of all, this celebration of Jesus never speaks the name Jesus. The title "Messiah" appears seven times, all with a definite Jewish flavor. (We should avoid the term "Christ," since this document was not written in Greek, and the term would give us misleading connotations.) Not a single Gospel detail is evident anywhere in these Odes. A handful of allusions which have suggested this or that Gospel incident to some commentators are, as we shall see, a part of the imagery the Odist has drawn from scripture.

Charlesworth declares that the crucifixion is "significantly portrayed" (*OTP*, p.732). Here is one of the two main passages he draws on, Ode 27 in its wispy entirety:

**1 I extended my hands
and hallowed my Lord;**

**2 For the expansion of my hands
is his sign.**

**3 And my extension
is the upright wood.**

The word "wood" is often used in later Syriac literature for the cross (of Jesus), but it also means "tree," and the word has ties with the image of the wood-tree of Paradise, which symbolizes a source of life. In fact, there is evocative imagery in the Odes (11 and 38) of the Odist/believer planted and blooming like a tree in Paradise, rooted and "spread out" like the branches of a tree.

Ode 27, then, with its spread hands (i.e., arms extended straight out sideways), could be a mystically significant prayer posture, and not an echo of the cross. There is, as one can see, nothing in this Ode to suggest the idea of crucifixion. That Jesus' cross lies behind this "sign" is something which Charlesworth and others have read into it.

Moreover, who is the "Lord" referred to in verse 1? Compare the first verse of Ode 37, where the poet says: "I extended my hands toward the Lord, and toward the Most High I raised my voice." The "Lord" is in parallel with the "Most High," which refers to God. (This kind of repetitive juxtaposition is common in Old Testament poetry: the two terms are not references to different figures. And the rest of the Ode makes this clear.)

Here, then, the poet is "extending his hands" (same Syriac words) in supplication *to God*, with no allusion to wood (or a cross). Consequently, it would seem that in Ode 27, "Lord" is also a reference to God and that the "sign" belongs to him—curious, if it is supposed to be Jesus' cross that is in mind. (As a general rule, all references to "Lord" in the Odes are to God, except when they are expressly linked with the "Messiah".) Thus, Charlesworth's claim that Ode 27 is a "portrayal" of the crucifixion is highly dubious.

The other passage which Charlesworth points to, in Ode 42, is almost identical. We'll examine it later and look again at the question of just what the gesture of the extended hands/arms might or might not signify. A couple of other passages which he enlists as references to Jesus' suffering and death have even less to recommend them. We'll note these later, too.

The pickings concerning the resurrection are even slimmer. A verse from Ode 42 says:

**6 Then I arose and am with them,
and will speak by their mouths.**

This vague idea is certainly niggardly, and that it is linked to a preceding death is far from clear (see later). Charlesworth thinks to see the resurrection implied in any use of the idea of raising, elevation or rescue (such as 8:5). In Ode 17, through a rather circuitous association, he translates a word usually meaning "prayer" or "request" as "resurrection," again in a context which has nothing to say about Good Friday or Easter.

In any case, such elusive events are unattached to any idea of blood sacrifice or atonement, for these concepts never appear in the Odes of Solomon. The poet may be celebrating his salvation, but it is not a salvation achieved through any process resembling orthodox Christian doctrine.

This, in some 500 verses, is the sum of the "emphasis" spent on the central Christian doctrines of the cross and the resurrection—if indeed such images can even be detected.

A Focus on God

As is evident in No. 1 above, the Odes are overwhelmingly theocentric. Their focus, their exaltation, is centered on God. He is the "Lord". This term is used in constant echo of the biblical Psalms, often in association with "Father" and "Most High". Consider Ode 5:

**1 I praise you, O Lord,
because I love you.**

**2 O Most High, abandon me not,
for you are my hope.**

**3 Freely did I receive your grace.
May I live by it.**

Or Ode 14:

**1 As the eyes of a son upon his father,
so are my eyes, O Lord, at all times toward you...**

**4 Stretch out to me, my Lord, at all times your right hand,
and be to me a guide till the end according to your will...**

10 For you are sufficient for all our needs.

In passages like this the poet exults in what he has received from God, not from Jesus. His love, his needs, his hopes, his thanks, are channeled toward the Father. Could that last line possibly have been penned by anyone deserving the name Christian?

Salvation comes not from Jesus but from God, as in Ode 15:

**1 As the sun is the joy to them who seek its daybreak,
so is my joy the Lord...**

**6 I abandoned the way of error,
and went toward him and received salvation from him
generously...**

**8 And I have put on immortality through his name,
and stripped off corruption by his grace.**

Even the term "Helper," a concept which would have provided a natural hook to attach Jesus to, is in its several appearances, such as Ode 25, also an appellation of God:

**1 I was rescued from my chains,
and fled unto you, O my God.**

**2 Because you are the right hand of salvation
and my Helper.**

Even in extended passages which present a more detailed comment on the wonder of salvation, the figure, the very sense of a redeeming Jesus is missing. Consider Ode 11:

**3 And his circumcising became my salvation,
and I ran in the Way, in his peace,
in the Way of Truth...**

**5 And I was established on the rock of truth
where he had set me.**

**6 And speaking waters touched my lips
from the fountain of the Lord generously.**

**7 And so I drank and became intoxicated
from the living water that does not die...**

**12 And from above (the Lord) gave me immortal rest
and I became like the land which blossoms and rejoices
in its fruits.**

It is difficult to detect here any "joyous tone of thanksgiving for the advent of the Messiah," as Charlesworth has put it (*OTP*, p.726). It is God with whom the poet is intoxicated. It is he who dispenses the "living water." As in some of the New Testament epistles, God is regularly called "Savior"; to him go thanks for salvation.

This is not to say that the Odes do not contain in many places the idea of an intermediary figure or force. If they did not, they would be of no interest to us. But this cannot be interpreted properly if the highly poetic and symbolic imagery describing such a figure is blithely applied to the Gospel Jesus, or if we do not first set a stage which shows that the Odists' fundamental orientation is toward God.

We are not facing simply a lack of all the basic elements of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in these Odes. The void extends to any sense of Jesus as a recent figure or personality who is the object of the poet's faith and the reason for his allegiance to the sect he belongs to. The equation with Jesus of Nazareth is undeniably missing, but the dimension of the intermediary "Son" is there, and a proper analysis of the Odes of Solomon can provide us with a very revealing window onto the philosophical roots of the Christian movement.

Salvation Through Word and Wisdom

The last quote above, from Ode 11, indicates the nature and means of God's salvation. The motif of "God's truth" is ever on the poet's lips. His verses are full of longstanding Jewish imagery representing the knowledge received from God. Ode 6 speaks of this knowledge as a "stream" which becomes a broad river, sweeping over the earth, quenching the thirst of all who drink. The spread of water as a metaphor for the flowing forth of God's spirit and knowledge is an occasional Old Testament idea. Here none of this knowledge is said to come through an historical Jesus, though the phrase "living water" was to be applied to such a figure by the community of John.

One line in Ode 34 sums up the poet's picture of redemption:

**6 Grace has been revealed for your salvation.
Believe and live and be saved.**

The pattern is simple: revelation of God's grace and truth, belief in that revelation, the consequent guarantee of eternal life. The silence on the Gospel Jesus and his work of redemption is resounding.

In Ode 25 the poet gains strength over his adversaries, he has been raised up and healed, not by the works of Jesus, but by God's truth. Truth is the object of the paean in Ode 12, truth coming from the mouth of God. And here we meet a mild personification of this truth in the use of the term "Word". We should not make this fully equivalent to the Greek Logos, for it still retains much of its traditional sense as the utterance of God, the revelation of himself to the world:

**3 And he (God) has caused his knowledge to abound in me,
because the mouth of the Lord is the true word,
and the door of his light...**

**6 (The Word) never falls, but ever stands,
his descent and his way are incomprehensible...**

**8 And by him the generations spoke to one another,
and those that were silent acquired speech...**

**11 For the mouth of the Most High spoke to them,
and the interpretation of himself was swift through him.**

**12 For the dwelling-place of the Word is man,
and his truth is love.**

**13 Blessed are they who by means of him have recognized
everything,
and have known the Lord in his truth.**

It is this kind of highly symbolic and poetic language which scholars like Charlesworth identify with Jesus of Nazareth. But there is no sense of an historical person here; the masculine pronoun reflects the gender of this particular term for "word" in Syriac. (In some places a different Syriac word is used which is feminine.) And how could a poet compose an "Ode to the Word" without a single allusion to Jesus' life and death?

Rather, these and such lines as "The Lord has directed my mouth by his Word" (Ode 10) and "the Lord overthrew my enemy by his Word" (Ode 29) represent God working through his own aspects, within entirely spiritual channels. Yet we can see how such things point in the direction of an ever increasing personification. God's Word, his knowledge and salvation, inhabit and enlighten the mind of religious humanity, and it is not too many steps from this idea to John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

This personification of the Word is reminiscent of another common way Jews had of speaking about God's knowledge imparted to humanity; namely, through personified Wisdom (see Part Two of the Main Articles). And in fact, though the Odist avoids the term "Wisdom" itself, he often uses traditional wisdom language and metaphors. The above Ode 12, concerning the "Word," is Wisdom poetry under another name, very similar to the hymn to Wisdom in Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 24. In Ode 30, we hear the voice of Lady Wisdom calling, the one who inhabits Proverbs:

**2 And come all you thirsty and take a drink,
and rest beside the fountain of the Lord.**

Indeed, the Odist presents her in person under another name in Ode 33:

**5 However, the perfect Virgin stood
who was preaching and summoning and saying:**

**6 O you sons of men, return,
and ye their daughters, come.**

**7 And abandon the ways of the Corrupter [Satan]
and approach me...**

**10 Hear me and be saved,
for I am proclaiming unto you the grace of God.**

Now it is certainly strange that this "Christian" poet who is supposedly exulting in the arrival of the Messiah would give us a scene of Wisdom preaching, but never a word of Jesus' own; that he could offer salvation through the hearing of Wisdom, but bend no ear to the voice or role of Jesus of Nazareth. It will not do to label this an elaborate metaphor referring to Jesus, for nothing in the Odes suggests this, and what we do have fits perfectly into more traditional Jewish modes of expression. Some commentators on the Odes (e.g., J. T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns*, p. 114) have no trouble recognizing this passage as a portrayal of personified Wisdom.

A Divine Voice

Some of the Odes possess a feature which has led to much cogitation by commentators. Without any notice in the text, the vantage point within an Ode will shift from the voice of the Odist to a divine voice. Charlesworth and predecessors have labeled these passages "Christ speaks" (*ex ore Christi*). But it would be better not to be so committal. This is the voice of God speaking through his communicating aspect, sometimes with a strong Wisdom flavor, sometimes with other features. Since one of the strongest motifs of the Odes is the idea that the personified "Word" of God has descended and taken up residence within the Odist, it is natural for the poet to let that voice take over and speak directly.

It is significant that Ode 33, quoted just above, speaks in exactly the same terminology and flavor found in the sections of other Odes which have been labeled "Christ Speaks," yet here the poet clearly identifies the speaker as Wisdom herself. We are entitled to assume that the same generic voice is present everywhere, that no Jesus of Nazareth is in mind in any of the poet's verses.

In Ode 8, this voice expresses itself in traditional Wisdom language:

**11 Understand my knowledge, you who know me in truth;
love me with affection, you who love...**

**13 And before they had existed,
I recognized them;
and imprinted a seal on their faces.**

**14 I fashioned their members,
and my own breasts I prepared for them
that they might drink my holy milk and live by it.**

That last line refers to the Divine Knowledge which Wisdom imparts, again embodied in a drink metaphor. The voice of Wisdom also speaks in the "*ex ore Christi*" section of Ode 10, telling how it had "captured the world" and gathered together the scattered gentiles. How had it accomplished this?

**6 And the traces of the light were set upon their hearts;
and they walked in my life and were saved,**

and they became my people for ever and ever.

Here there is no reference to Jesus' sacrifice or even his teaching. It is the saving light of the knowledge of the Lord, conferred through Wisdom. The gentiles are saved according to the traditional biblical view: that those who accept the "light" of knowledge of the Hebrew God will be welcomed as part of God's people. Probably there were gentile "Godfearers" attached to the Odist's community and his few lines like this were a nod in their direction. Or he may have been voicing the traditional expectation about the salvation of the nations.

The Son

But although this is the language of Wisdom (under the name "Word"), there is a reason why the poet does not make her the sole voice of God's revelation. For in his philosophical circle, Wisdom now shares the limelight with "the Son". In fact, Wisdom has been enlisted in the role of divine mother to this Son. We saw in Ode 33 how the term "Virgin" was used as a reference to Wisdom. Thus when Ode 19 speaks of the Son born of the Virgin, this is not an allusion to Mary or the Nativity, as Charlesworth and others would have it. Here the poet is presenting a symbolic picture of the relationship between various aspects of the Godhead. Again he uses the metaphor of divine milk, with four divine personages involved in dispensing it to humanity.

**1 A cup of milk was offered to me,
and I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord's kindness.**

**2 The Son is the cup,
and the Father is he who was milked;
and the Holy Spirit is she who milked him...**

**4 The Holy Spirit opened her bosom,
and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.**

**5 Then she gave the mixture to the world without their
knowing,
and those who received it are in the perfection of the
right hand.**

**6 The womb of the Virgin took it
and she received conception and gave birth...**

**8 And she labored and bore the Son but without pain,
because it did not occur without purpose.**

It is curious that Harris and Mingana can acknowledge Ode 33 with its "perfect Virgin" to be the voice of Wisdom speaking, yet here in Ode 19 they regard Wisdom as contained in the figure of the Holy Spirit. This, of course, is because they are drawn to see the "Virgin" of verse 6 as a reference to Mary. But this is poetic allegory. Wisdom in some ancient Jewish traditions is a kind of consort to the Father; Philo sometimes makes her a mother to the Logos. None of these things have anything to do with human history (nor are features of any Nativity story present). They are allegorical ways of representing the workings of Deity. The first century was an era of philosophical reflection on the Son, and it is no surprise that the Odist works him into his poetry and philosophy. (It was the presence of such mystical thinking in the air of the time which helped pave the way to the creation of "historical" tales of actual birth of a human son to a human mother.)

In any case, whatever way God communicates and redeems, the end result is the transmission of his knowledge, which itself bestows perfection and salvation (as verse 5 conveys). The Gospel Son puts in no appearance here, nor does any idea of a salvation effected by his death and resurrection.

Motifs of Persecution

Ode 28, in fact, in its "divine voice" section, is incompatible with such a death. If this is Christ speaking, what is meant by this line?

**18 And they sought my death but were unsuccessful,
because I was older than their memory...**

This is one of the Odes which alludes to persecution. Like the ancient Psalmist, this writer has known the hostility of the world. Here he transfers the role of the persecuted onto the divine voice of Wisdom or the Son (neither is specified), for God in his communication with the world has ever—in the view of the religious mind—been attacked and rejected. (The rejection of God's Wisdom is a motif found throughout Jewish writings.) The believer always regards the rejection of himself as the rejection of the God he is representing. And since in the Odes the Word of God is seen as dwelling within the speaker, the two suffer a mutual persecution.

Although Charlesworth includes this passage as an example of those which address Jesus' suffering and death, there is in this picture of rejection no reference to any crucifixion. A few lines are clearly drawn from scripture:

**14 And they surrounded me like mad dogs,
who ignorantly attack their masters.**

This is a borrowing from Psalm 22, verse 16. The Psalm's verse 18 appears in this line:

18c and in vain did they cast lots against me.

It is significant that such an image is in no way similar to its use in the Gospels, where it is part of the scene at the foot of the cross.

The same kind of biblical imagery is found in another "persecution" Ode, No. 31. The opening of the "divine voice" section (verses 6 to 13) is strongly Wisdom flavored, appealing to those who have been afflicted. Here the Odist portrays the divine figure as having undergone a similar affliction and rejection—but no death. Even so, to some this conjures up an echo of the Gospel trial and crucifixion scene.

Yet verse 3 makes it clear that the Odist is simply reworking the sentiments of Psalm 22, allusions to which abound in this Ode. Ideas of "condemnation," "dividing my spoil," "holding my peace," "bearing their bitterness" are all drawn from the Psalms. The trap commentators fall into is to see such things as representing in poetic allusion the incidents portrayed in the Gospels. But the Gospel motifs are themselves drawn from the same source that served the Odist: the holy scriptures, which presented Jewish interpreters, preachers and mystics with a universe of meaning and detail, a window onto the spiritual realm of God. The stage represented by the Odes has not yet coalesced all this scriptural imagery about divine intermediary figures and forces, such as Wisdom and the Son, into the experiences of a human incarnation who had recently lived on earth.

Approaching Incarnation

But there are metaphorical intimations of incarnation in the Odes, and to understand these is to understand the philosophical route Christianity took in arriving at the human Jesus of Nazareth. We will focus on two Odes, Nos. 7 and 23. Let's start with the later one:

**4 Walk in the knowledge of the Most High
and you shall know the grace of the Lord generously...**

**5 And his thought was like a letter,
and his will descended from on high...**

**7 And many hands rushed to the letter,
to seize it and to take it and read it.**

Again, it is God's knowledge which saves. How has it reached humanity? Something from God descends to earth: his thought, his will. Personified Wisdom, with her journeys to the world and her appeals to the sons and daughters of men to hear her (in Proverbs and other writings) are an expression of this fundamental idea. Here the Odist uses the metaphor of a letter containing the thought of God. This letter suffers opposition; an inimical wheel runs over it. But the letter triumphs and is broadcast to the world. Then the Odist introduces a personification. The "head" of the letter is revealed as

18b even the Son of Truth from the Most High Father.

Instead of restricting himself to the more traditional imagery for the channel of Divine Knowledge, the figure of Wisdom, the poet here labels it "the Son," the Son that is Truth, or rather, God's Truth that is the Son. The "first-born" of God, his primary emanation, sometimes his "only-begotten", is a figure in contemporary religious philosophy, Jewish and Greek, which represents the knowledge about himself that the ultimate God gives off, the intermediary force which allows humanity to know a transcendent God (see Part Two). The Son is the "head" of God's emanations. He is the channel through which God's grace and salvation flow.

Though the Odist has no qualms about directing his expressions of love to the Lord himself, on some occasions he speaks of his love for the Son. Both are present in Ode 3:

**3 For I should not have known how to love the Lord
(i.e., God)
if he had not loved me...**

**5 I love the Beloved and my soul loves him,
and where his rest is, there also am I...**

**7 I have been united (to God) because the lover has
found the Beloved,
because I love him that is the Son, I shall become a son.**

The Beloved is a traditional term (mostly found in Diaspora Judaism) applied to someone beloved by God, such as the Messiah or Israel as a whole. Here it is used of the Son, symbolizing the loving aspect of God. Later it was applied to the figure of Jesus.

These verses convey the strong impression that God and the Son are so closely associated that the latter is simply an aspect of the former and not a distinct personage. In fact, verse 10 clearly identifies this Son and his role, one virtually identical to personified Wisdom:

**10 This is the Spirit of the Lord, which is not false,
which teaches the sons of men to know his ways.**

Surely here, if the Odist had any Jesus of Nazareth in mind, he would have defined the Son in some way which would include a reference to his earthly identity or features.

Instead, the Odes reflect a stage of thought in which the Spirit of God, the divine will and word that descends from on high and gives humanity revelation of himself, is styled "the Son". He has absorbed and supplanted the more traditional Wisdom figure, though still retaining her language. In Ode 7, sometimes referred to as an "incarnational Ode," the face of this Son is figuratively present, for the poet introduces the idea that God, in sending his knowledge to the world, assumes a likeness to humanity.

**3 He (God) has generously shown himself to me in his
simplicity,
because his kindness has diminished his grandeur.**

**4 He became like me that I might receive him.
In form (or essence, image) that I might put him on.**

**5 And I trembled not when I saw him
because he was gracious to me.**

**6 Like my nature he became, that I might understand him.
And like my form (essence, image) that I might not turn
away from him.**

Lest it be thought that such sentiments suggest a poetic allusion to Jesus of Nazareth, we must not lose sight of certain things. The Odist is not introducing here any historical figure who represents the form God has taken on. Rather, it is God himself who undergoes the transformation; it is God to whom the poet is relating, not Jesus. This fits better the idea behind the poetic metaphor: God, in approaching humanity with his knowledge, allows humanity to understand him by assuming human conceptions. All philosophers believed that the true nature of God was utterly alien to anything the human mind could comprehend, and so he had to "translate himself" into concepts the material world was familiar with.

This in itself was "a diminishing of his greatness" (verse 3), and it would explain the meaning behind the word "sacrifice" which appears in verse 10: "...allowed me to benefit from his sacrifice." This sacrifice is not a blood one, but the surrender of God's perfection to approach humanity. Charlesworth admits that this word is present only here in the Odes, and that no allusion can be found anywhere to the ideas of sin, repentance or forgiveness. Besides, Harris and Mingana point out that the word also means "favor" or "gift".

Thus, the standard Christian concept of why God took on the form of Jesus (or sent his Son to assume human form) is completely missing here: namely, to suffer and die and provide an atoning salvation. Instead, God becomes like the Odist so that "I might understand him," that "I might put him on." ("Like a garment," says Ode 11:11.) Hardly a reference to an historical

figure; and any human teacher idea is notably missing. Verse 12 of Ode 7 tells us why God sent his Son:

**12 He has allowed him to appear to them that are his own;
in order that they may recognize him that made them.**

Note that this Son appears only to the believing elect. The Son is God disclosing himself by revelation. Only by God approaching the human being in ways that can be understood is the poet able to receive God into himself. This taking on of God, even an ingesting of God, is one of the primary mystical images of the Odes, often expressed in metaphors of food and drink. Instead of the more common imagery of an out-of-body ascent to heaven, this mystic sees God descending to him (sometimes expressed in the figure of the Son or Beloved) and entering him as figurative nourishment. The divine voice even declares that believers are "my members and I was their head" (Ode 17:16), terms very much like Paul's mystical view of the spiritual Christ.

This "incarnational" Ode (7) is full of Wisdom imagery reminiscent of Proverbs, which strengthens the interpretation that the "form" God has taken on is not Jesus of Nazareth but rather a personification like Wisdom, under the name of "Son" or "Word". A key verse in the Ode,

**15 For by him he was served
and he was pleased by the Son,**

is almost certainly derived from Proverbs 8:30, in which Wisdom speaks of her time when she served as God's assistant in creation: "Then I was at his side each day, his darling and delight."

That no Jesus of Nazareth is in mind seems clear when the poet goes on to detail the consequences of God's assumption of his "form" or "nature":

**16 And because of his salvation he (God) will possess
everything
and the Most High will be known by his holy ones...**

**20 And hatred will be removed from the earth,
and (along) with jealousy it will be drowned.**

**21 For ignorance was destroyed upon it (the earth)
because the knowledge of the Lord came upon it.**

Once again the poet shows us that his focus is on God and the salvation that comes upon the earth through the knowledge of him which descends from on high. He has gone so far as to style this knowledge something personified in a "Son" and similar to the likeness of humanity, but any resemblance to the role of the Gospel Jesus ends there.

Another "incarnational" Ode carries the idea of "likeness to humanity" a little further. Ode 41:11-15 is an elaborate metaphor for the knowledge of God descending to men and women in a personified form:

**11 And his Word is with us in all our way,
the Savior who gives life and does not reject ourselves:**

**12 The Man who humbled himself,
and was exalted by his own righteousness.**

**13 The Son of the Most High appeared
in the perfection of his Father.**

**14 And light dawned from the Word
that was before time in him.**

**15 The Messiah in truth is one.
And he was known before the foundation of the world,
that he might give life to persons forever by the truth
of his name.**

First, attention must be called once again to the constant motif of the Odes: that salvation, the giving of life, is conferred through knowledge of God. "Light dawned from the Word." Life is given "by the truth of his name." This "name" is the same as that attached to the Father, as in Ode 39:

8 Put on the name of the Most High and know him...

where it obviously signifies an aspect of the same deity, the Father himself.

Not even in this passage, which commentators see as the most graphic allusion to Jesus of Nazareth in the Odes, does the poet make a reference to a death and resurrection, nor does he mention a ministry in which Jesus preached such a "truth" and knowledge of God. Instead, we have one more expression of the Odists' ever-present idea that God works through spiritual dimensions of himself to bring light and truth to the world.

As for verse 12, it is not as problematic as it might appear. Using the term "Man" is only a little more dramatic than Ode 7's line (see above) that God "became like me that I might receive him." In poetry many things are possible, and the philosophical literature of the time occasionally contains Platonic-type ideas which call God or some subordinate divine figure "Man" (*anthropos*) in the sense of an Ideal or prototypic man, a "heavenly Man". Such a "man" was envisioned as entirely spiritual (as, for example, by Philo in *Allegorical Interpretation of the Law* 1,31). He was a part of the Godhead or heavenly scene. That this "Man" humbled himself rephrases another idea in the above passage from Ode 7, that God in revealing himself in a form which could be understood was "diminishing his greatness." We can see a related expression of this in a further developed form (with the idea of death added) in the christological hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. Verse 12b parallels the motif of exaltation in the latter part of that hymn. But to suggest that it refers to Jesus' resurrection is unjustified, not the least because no idea preceding it can be pressed into signifying death.

The Messiah

This Ode is also one of the few occasions when the poet uses the term "Messiah" (Anointed One). Here it is a synonym for "Word" or "Son," and is yet another item in the Odists' repertoire to refer to the communicating and saving aspects of God. Like Wisdom, the Messiah is pre-existent, "before time" with the Father, and "known before the foundation of the world," attributes given to the spiritual Christ in some Pauline letters.

The nature of this "Messiah" is evident in other Odes. Ode 9 contains these lines:

**3 The word of the Lord and his desires,
the holy thought which he has thought concerning his
Messiah.**

**4 For in the will of the Lord is your life,
and his purpose is eternal life,
and your end is incorruptible.**

Here the Messiah is clearly associated with the concepts of "the word of the Lord" and his "will"; the Messiah is "the thought he has thought." Such things hardly represent the independent figure of an historical Jesus of Nazareth. And how any Christian could have said that eternal life rests in God's "will," with no clearer reference to Jesus, would be difficult to fathom.

That the Messiah is to be equated with some mediatorial aspect of God is seen in Ode 41:

**3 We live in the Lord by his grace,
and life we receive by his Messiah.**

**4 For a great day has shined upon us,
and wonderful is he who has given us of his glory.**

The "glory" of God is that stream he gives off, the source of life, extolled by mystic philosophers from Platonists to Philonists. (See E. R. Goodenough: *By Light, Light*.) This knowable stream of glory is here styled "Messiah". As an aspect of God, the Messiah also attracts the title "Lord".

In Ode 39, in speaking of raging rivers that are dangerous and difficult to cross, the Odist tells his readers (verse 9) that the Lord (referring to the Most High in the preceding verse) has already "bridged them by his word." He has "walked and crossed them on foot." Rather than an allusion to the Gospel miracle of Jesus walking on water, this is a poetic metaphor for the safe path over the difficult waters provided by God's knowledge, a path forged by the Word/Messiah, God's spiritual, symbolic intermediary. These "footsteps of our Lord Messiah stand firm," and provide a passage for those who would cross.

Harris and Mingana admit: "The description of the Lord's walking on the waves reminds one of Galilee, but there are parallel expressions in the Old Testament." A good point, because the Galilee context is nowhere in evidence here. And when the poet speaks in the final line of those who cross over after the Lord Messiah and "adore his name," comparison with verse 8 (quoted above) shows that this name is inseparable from "the name of the Most High." All saving figures in these Odes are inseparable from God.

Scholars like to see the opening of Ode 24 as pointing to another Gospel incident. Charlesworth (*OTP*, p.757) confidently declares these verses as "an allusion to Jesus' baptism."

**1 The Dove flew over the head of our Lord Messiah,
because he was her head.**

**2 And she sang over him,
and her voice was heard.**

But there is nothing of a baptism in this Ode, and what the following lines have to do with any scene by the Jordan is murky to say the least:

**3 Then the inhabitants were afraid,
and the foreigners were disturbed.**

**4 The birds took to flight,
and all creeping things died in their holes.**

The Final Ode

Finally, we will look at some details of the last Ode, No. 42. The variety of emphasis and differing imagery between one Ode and another leads one to wonder whether they might be a collection composed over time, perhaps by more than one person in the community, perhaps even reflecting a degree of evolution in its ideas. Scholars have dated the Odes anywhere from the mid first century to the late second century, but the consensus seems to have settled on the period around the year 100. I would hazard a somewhat earlier date, but anywhere in the latter first century would fit with the picture of the Odes' relationship to the writings of the Johannine community, and to the Dead Sea Scrolls which were placed in the Qumran caves during the first Jewish War.

Ode 42 opens with lines very similar to the little Ode 27 we looked at earlier when searching for references to the crucifixion:

**1 I stretched out my hands and approached my Lord;
for the stretching out of my hands is his sign.**

**2a And my extension is the common (or outspread) wood...
(or tree: Charlesworth translates this as "cross")**

Both Charlesworth and Harris/Mingana point to sources from the second century and later which indicate that extending the hands (we would say the arms) outward so that the body forms the shape of a tree or cross, was a Christian attitude of prayer in some circles, including Syria, and signified the cross of Christ. But is this what is being implied in these first century Odes? Such a conclusion is anything but clear.

The poet in Odes 35 and 37 describes this same gesture (only the latter is in the context of prayer), but both are clearly directed toward God the Father, and neither speaks of the symbolism of a tree or cross. In Odes 27 and 42, a similar wording requires us to assume that the "Lord" in these two Odes is also a reference to God the Father, as is every use of the term Lord except when linked with the "Messiah".

Now, the poet tells us that this gesture of extending the hands is "his sign," referring to the Lord, meaning God. This in itself virtually precludes any idea that the sign is thought of as the cross of Christ, for the poet would surely identify such a sign with him, not with God. Although we do not know the significance of this gesture, spreading out the arms in the shape of a tree must therefore have been a practice among some groups when praying to God. I noted earlier that there are connections between this word and the wood-tree of Paradise, which symbolizes a source of life, and that the Odes contain images of the believer being planted and blooming like a tree. Images of the tree of Knowledge would certainly relate to the fundamental idea the Odists express throughout these poems, that salvation comes through knowledge of God.

Furthermore, in none of the Odes where this gesture is referred to (note especially Ode 37) does the poet associate it with sentiments suggesting suffering or atonement, nor is it ever put into the mouth of the divine speaker. It is also difficult to imagine that a prayer gesture signifying

crucifixion would be a prominent expression within a sect which quite obviously allots no significance whatever to such a crucifixion. If the poet is extending his arms to form a cross, why does that cross never figure in his theology and soteriology?

Indeed, the gesture seems to have associations of mystic ascent, for Ode 35 says:

**7 And I extended my hands in the lifting up of my soul,
and I directed myself towards the Most High,
and I was redeemed toward him.**

But there is other evidence that this gesture has, for the Odist, nothing to do with crucifixion. Psalm 88 forms the poet's starting point for the descriptive heart of Ode 42, and it contains this line (verse 9): "I have called upon thee, O Lord, every day, and spread out my hands in prayer to thee." Such spreading out of the hands hardly refers to anyone's crucifixion in Psalm 88, but is rather an attitude of supplication to God. Whether or not at the time of the Psalm this gesture was identical to the Odist's, there is little doubt that he would have taken it to be so. Harris and Mingana (p. 407) have compared the Syriac wording of the relevant phrase of the Psalm in the Peshitta (the Syriac version of the Old Testament) with that of Ode 42 and found it identical. Once again, any reference to a truly Christian motif in the Odes of Solomon has proven frustratingly elusive.

Finally, the attitude of prayer or supplication with the hands outstretched was not peculiar to Christianity. D. Plooij in the *Expository Times* of 1912 points out that pagans too had the same attitude of prayer, and it did not signify a cross. If such a prayer gesture existed in both Jewish and pagan circles, it would be no surprise to find Christians reinterpreting it as a symbol for the cross of Christ, and fairly quickly. The oldest instance of the gesture taking on this significance (though not as prayer) can be found in the Gospel of John. As the second century progressed, the gesture and its new meaning became widespread.

But we still have to account for the line which the poet has added to those opening verses of Ode 42:

**2b which (i.e., the tree) was lifted up (or erected)
on the way of the Righteous One.**

Charlesworth draws attention to the fact that this form of the Syriac verb "lift up" took on a special denotation: "to be hung on the cross." But making this point is surely invalid here, for in this verse it could not possibly have such a meaning. The tree can hardly be spoken of as being hung on itself. Yet it is this sometime connotation to the verb which Charlesworth appeals to in interpreting "tree" as referring to the cross. That, and "because the Odes are Christian." All of this sounds more than faintly circular.

If it is not crucifixion, what is signified by the tree that was "set up (or perhaps stood) on the way of the Righteous One"? (The Righteous One may refer to the divine voice who begins to speak immediately afterward, but this is by no means secure.) Well, I will not venture a guess. Commentators themselves do no more than assume some allusion to the crucifixion in this very cryptic line. But since this idea is nowhere developed, either here or anywhere else in the Odes, and since the usual reasoning used to derive the meaning of the cross from these verses has been shown to be faulty, such claims must be set aside as preconception. The true significance of these words, as of so many passages in the Odes, is probably lost to us. It is also unclear just who is being referred to by the term "Righteous One". It may even be God; at the very least, it is one of his personifications.

The remaining 18 verses of this final Ode develop an idea that has only been alluded to at a couple of points previously and is familiar as a traditional theme in Jewish expectation: the bringing up of the spirits of the righteous dead from Sheol. Earlier, in Ode 29, the poet has praised God (not Jesus), because:

**4 He caused me to ascend from the depths of Sheol
and from the mouth of Death he drew me.**

To judge by the context, the poet seems to be speaking figuratively about a rescue from persecution, although he may be modeling the sentiment on the anticipation of a similar rescue after death. But in Ode 42 this rescue of the righteous from Sheol is a role he assigns to the Son as Savior. Such a task was eventually given to Jesus to fill the interim between his death and resurrection (and even to the spiritual Christ, as in 1 Peter 3:19). But here any suggestion of such events is to be found only by those already convinced that they lie in the background. In fact, Ode 22, which first alludes to the Savior's task in Sheol, lacks any such features as death and resurrection, let alone an atonement:

**1 He who caused me to descend from on high
and to ascend from the regions below...**

As in the vision of the descent of the Son in the Ascension of Isaiah 9 and 10, where the Son is commissioned to proceed through the layers of heaven as far as Sheol and then return, there seems to be no suggestion of a life intervening between this descent and ascent.

Thus in Ode 42 the following lines must be given a Wisdom character over any Gospel connotation:

**10 I was not rejected although I was considered to be so,
and I did not perish although they thought it of me.**

This is the Son who is an emanation of God working in the spiritual realm, struggling with the world's hostility as Wisdom did, saving the believer through the divine knowledge he transmits. Thus there can be no concept of death for this divine figure here, making the phrase in verse 6, "Then I arose..." highly unlikely as a reference to a resurrection, as Charlesworth claims (see near the beginning of this article). In the remaining verses of the Ode this figure is engaged on a special mission to the underworld:

**11 Sheol saw me and was shattered,
and Death ejected me and many with me...**

**14 And I made a congregation of living among his dead;
and I spoke with them by living lips;
in order that my word may not fail.**

**15 And those who had died ran toward me;
and they cried and said, "Son of God, have pity on us.**

**16 And deal with us according to your kindness,
and bring us out from the chains of darkness..."**

**19 Then I heard their voice,
and placed their faith in my heart.**

20 And I placed my name upon their heads, because they are free and they are mine.

Thus the last word goes not to any Jesus of Nazareth and his act of sacrifice, of which there is not a murmur in the Odes, but to the name which confers knowledge and salvation, won by faith and acceptance of that name. Ultimately, that name is the name of God.

The Ode ends, as they all do, with a "Hallelujah."

Epilogue

No modern interpreter will ever get inside the intimate meaning and rich connotation of these Odes. Their mindset cannot be recaptured in anything but the most general way from the vantage point of today's reader. But to spray paint them in the colors of the Gospels is a travesty of restoration which effectively buries what glimmer of meaning we might derive from these golden, subtle poems.

As certain strands of Jewish thinking increasingly saw God as a spectrum, pulsating in an outward stream of activity, pulses of divine knowledge, the Law, of saving graces and redeeming figure-forces, they created for themselves an immensely rich spiritual dimension and a mystical universe whose subtleties have been largely lost to us and whose outlook has long since ceased to speak to times which came after. Indeed, it was a phase which degenerated quite quickly into something less rich, less mystical, but something more accessible, as elitist sects broadened into popular religious movements. Once this overarching spiritual canopy, illumined by the sacred writings, descended to the material world and was translated into mundane history, it lost much of its wonder, and scripture went slumming as the repository of mere prophecies of earthbound events. One of the things which suffered was Christian literature, for it was forced henceforth to tread upon the earth. I would maintain that no poet to equal the Odist was ever again produced.

The Odes of Solomon are a priceless jewelled window onto the early development of Christ belief, part of a "proto-Christian" stream. Their composer inhabits a community which has cultified the communicating aspect of God, a layer superimposed upon the traditional Jewish worship of God, but still oriented toward him. There is as yet no firm development of an incarnation—certainly not in "flesh"—and the Word or Son is probably not yet perceived as a separate entity, only a highlighted aspect of God, an emanation from him that serves a revelatory, mediatorial function, channel of the knowledge which brings salvation to the elect.

But a complex of spiritual attributes, titles and feelings are coalescing around this emanation, drawing the believer's and the Odist's attentions, not away from God himself, but toward a different way of viewing him, although the Odist often bypasses this aspect entirely, keeping the traditional focus directly on the Father and Lord. These parts of God are beginning to assume their own personality, attracting love and worship of their own. They are developing their own spiritual mythology, drawn from older Wisdom speculation and outside influences. The Word as God's voice, Wisdom as his helper and channel of knowledge, the Son as his only-begotten, his representative in the world, are merging into an hypostasis, a stripped-off aspect of God with an identity of its own. Inevitably this process did not stand still, but led to the increasing sense of a separate divine personage. Mystical imagery became historical biography, and the immediate source of salvation passed from God to his Son.

When the evangelists brought Jesus of Nazareth into the light, they gave the Son a face.

Tracing The Christian Lineage In Alexandria

The Begetting of Christianity

When mythicists like Arthur Drews and J. M. Robertson were putting forth their views early in this century, of a Christianity without Jesus of Nazareth, one of the objections to their position was the following claim: “(These writers) must support their thesis by showing that there was a Jewish myth of a dying and rising God . . . the name Jesus must also be proved to be the name of a mythological figure, and evidence must be given of a pre-Christian Jesus cult.” This view was put forward by W. Foerster in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume III, p. 290 (published in the 1940s). Foerster went on to state: “There are no direct or unequivocal testimonies to any such cult.”

True enough. But such objections are misguided and unnecessary. It is often argued, for example, that the Jews did not possess the concept of a suffering Messiah. Well, they did. They possessed it in that line of thought, albeit a fringe one (and probably made up of a strong gentile element), which arose to become the dominant form of Christianity. The point is, there is no need to produce pre-Christian Christians. The Jewish sectarian movement which apostles like Paul joined and preached was itself the innovator. Paul, if not among the earliest founders, was one of its most creative and influential architects.

Unfortunately, we don't know where or when the first Jewish (or Hellenistic-Jewish) thinker rose up from a perusal of the sacred writings and declared that here was the truth: the Messiah was not a future ruler and human agent of God, a priest or warrior, but his own divine Son, a spiritual figure who was pre-existent with the Father. Moreover, he had, within the spiritual realm, descended from the highest sphere of heaven, suffered, died and been exalted in order to bring about the believers' own exaltation. We don't know who first applied the name “Yeshua” (Jesus), meaning “deliverer, savior,” to such a spiritual Son and Christ. Indeed, we don't know if any one individual can be accredited with such innovations. In fact, that is highly unlikely.

What we do know is that such innovators were building on contemporary religious philosophy, both Jewish and Greek. They had antecedents. Only if the fundamental concept of a heavenly intermediary between God and humanity was already part of the philosophical fabric of the time can we understand the genesis of the Christian movement, or the success which apostles like Paul achieved. The creation of Christian ideas out of this fabric was a process which undoubtedly took place at more than one location around the eastern Mediterranean, with various communities and individuals interacting on each other over the course of an unknown number of years. A record of such seminal evolutionary processes has been lost to us, but we can see early manifestations of them in such things as the christological hymns of Philippians (2:6-11), Colossians (1:15-20) and 1 Timothy (3:16), in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in the Wisdom-Word-Son mysticism of the Odes of Solomon (see Supplementary Article No. 4). And we can glean something of Paul's own application and rethinking of the fledgling ideas he embraced at various points in his letters.

That it was all the product of personal study and pondering over the sacred writings, envisioned as the action of the Spirit in revelation from God, is clear from many passages in the epistles. Paul knows of the Son because God has revealed such an entity directly to him (Galatians 1:16); the Son is the subject of God's gospel found in the prophets (Romans 1:1-4); and that he died and rose from death is knowledge Paul has received by revelation through a reading of scripture

(1 Corinthians 15:3-4: see Supplementary Article No. 6, “The Source of Paul’s Gospel”). At the hands of thinkers like Paul, the intermediary Son and his role in salvation was taking new shape.

Consciously or unconsciously, Paul and his contemporaries were fitting their spiritual Son into the thought patterns of the time. And these patterns can be discerned. Perhaps they are nowhere so clear as in Alexandria around the turn of the era, especially in the writings of Philo Judaeus. Philo might be styled a “grandfather” to Christianity, for some of his genes have been passed down to Paul and others, genes he himself had drawn from his own progenitors, the world of Platonic philosophy and Jewish Wisdom theology. Jesus’ genetic makeup was richly endowed.

Philo of Alexandria

The city of Alexandria was founded in the year 331 BCE by Alexander the Great in his march of conquest across the Persian empire. It was home to the largest Jewish community in the Diaspora. Here flourished the most prominent center of Jewish learning outside Palestine, the place where the Hebrew bible had been translated into Greek in the third century BCE. It was arguably the most important point of entry for Greek philosophy in its absorption by the Jews.

The foremost philosopher-theologian of Hellenistic Judaism was born around 25 BCE and lived until some time after the year 41 CE. Philo believed that the Platonic philosophy of his day (now called Middle Platonism) represented a true picture of God and the universe, supplemented by elements of the Stoic and Pythagorean systems. But Philo was first and foremost a Jew, and so he maintained that Judaism lay at the center of this picture, that the Jewish scriptures, as well as Jewish religious observance, embodied the very reality all this Greek philosophy pointed to. His extensive writings set out to illustrate this.

Such an outlook had been developing in Jewish apologetics even before Philo. One of the principal ways of interpreting scripture to make it reflect Greek philosophy was through the use of allegory and symbolism. The text itself could on the surface seem primitive and uninspiring and even be seen to contain unacceptable ideas, but by applying allegory, the literal meaning of the words could be swept aside, or at least supplemented, by deeper meaning. Thus the text could be made to say almost anything the interpreter wanted it to say. Moreover, once the Pentateuch was seen to embody the principles of Platonism, Moses as their author could then be trumpeted as the original promulgator of the truths of the universe—under God’s inspiration. Plato and his fellow Greek thinkers were declared to have gotten their ideas from Moses, through the Jewish scriptures, which they must have read (in Greek translation prior to the Septuagint!) before forming their own philosophies. The first prominent exponent of this audacious piece of chutzpah was Aristobolus of Alexandria, who seems to have flourished around the middle of the first century BCE.

Philo’s relationship to Christianity has over the centuries posed a problem for Christian apologists. On the one hand, he shows not the slightest knowledge of Jesus or the Christian movement, even though he would have survived the crucifixion by more than a decade. And yet his ideas (which would have predated Jesus’ career) have an undeniable affinity with Christian doctrine. The solution, of course, is that Philo represents an expression of the current philosophy of his day, a syncretism between Jewish and Greek, while Christianity was formed from a similar amalgamation of contemporary concepts. Whether any of the ideas in the early Christian catalogue were directly derived from Philo is unknown, but both lines of thought can be reduced to the concept of the Son, the spiritual intermediary between God and the world.

Views of God and the Universe

In Part Two of the Main Articles, I described how ancient thinking had arrived at the concept that an ultimate high God created and governed the universe. But as this God in the minds of philosophers became more and more transcendent, the problem arose as to how he could have any contact with the inferior world of matter. The solution was to postulate an intermediary divine force or entity, an emanation of the ultimate God, an “hypostasis” which took on its own character and identity.

Stoicism, incidentally, did not face such a problem, since it conceived of God as immanent in the world, virtually equivalent to Nature itself or the total universe. The reasoning or governing principle within it was thought of as the mind of God, and this the Stoics called the Logos. Humans possessed a spark of this divine reason within themselves—the Stoic “soul”—so that they shared in God’s nature; they were an integral part of the cosmic world, in continuity with God.

For Platonism, on the other hand, the governing force of the universe (God) lay outside matter, with the visible world only a distant imperfect reflection of the true spiritual reality above, creating a “dualistic” (in two parts) universe. The Platonists, too, adopted the term Logos, but they used it of the intermediate force which served as the link between God and the lower world. The first task of this force had been creation, a process in which the mind of God produced Ideas, and the intermediary agency, a creative aspect of God which Plato called the “Demiurge,” fashioned these Ideas into the material world (as well as into the stars and lower gods). The Logos was also defined as the image of God according to which humans were created, and it was regarded as the ongoing channel of spiritual communication between Deity and humanity.

Platonists generally did not regard the Logos as a personal being, but more an abstract force or principle. As Platonism progressed, the Logos was conceived of as approaching ever closer to the world of matter, to “flesh.” Plutarch, in the later first century, associated the Logos with the savior god Osiris, and regarded one aspect of God/Osiris as operating within matter (*Isis and Osiris*, 53f . See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p.200.)

For some, the Logos became an agency of salvation and took on decided personal characteristics. A very revealing little document (*Discourse to the Greeks*) which ended up being ascribed to Justin Martyr is probably a product of Hellenistic Judaism, perhaps written by a Greek who joined some sect among Diaspora Jews. Here are some of the things the writer says about the Logos and his faith in it. In this writer’s mind, it seems to have taken on the nature of a personal being:

“Come and partake of incomparable Sophia (Wisdom) and be instructed by the divine Logos . . . the divine Logos has ceaseless care over us . . . thou soul which has been permeated with the power of the Logos . . . (the Logos) makes mortals become immortal, human beings gods . . . the Logos drives from the soul the terrible sensual afflictions . . .”
(Chapter 5, from the translation by Adolph von Harnack, as quoted by E. R. Goodenough in *By Light, Light*, p.300)

As Goodenough has pointed out, this document contains no hint of Christ or any suggestion of Christianity, and yet it is undeniably cut from the same intellectual cloth. What we have here is an expression of faith in a saving power associated with God, a figure who serves as his intermediary with the world. The concept of “the Son” as a form of Savior is alive within Hellenism, albeit, if this is the case here, on the fringes of Judaism.

Philo adopted the Platonic Logos for his own picture of the universe, calling it “the Son” and “the first-begotten of God” (as in *De Confusione Linguarum*, 146). He also drew on the figure of Wisdom from Judaism’s own intermediary theology (see below). In some biblical and extra-biblical writings, Wisdom, a personified aspect of God, was an agent of creation and salvation, pre-existent with God in heaven. Philo occasionally makes her mother to the Logos. But such language seems to be symbolic only. Certainly, Philo envisioned no incarnation of this “Son” to earth.

Philo could not personalize his first-begotten of God, nor make him even as distinct a figure as the spiritual Christ who inhabited Paul’s mind, for his Jewish monotheistic instinct was too strong. Nor had he any apocalyptic leanings, with consequently little if any interest in the Messiah idea. Besides, Philo was a mystic, one who had achieved, so he believed, an ascent to God; he hints at intense religious experiences which make Paul sound earthbound. His focus on the Platonized God of Abraham could well have shut out the possibility of developing any allegiance or emotional investment in a subordinate deity. And so his “first-born Son” remained a largely abstract principle, the power by which God worked on the universe.

But he also saw the Logos as an intercessor, bringing it closer to Christianity’s Christ. “To his Word (Logos), His chief messenger, highest in age and honor, the Father of all has given the special prerogative, to stand on the border [between the two worlds] and separate the creature from the Creator. This same Word both pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted mortality and acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject.” (From the Loeb edition, p.385-7.)

The power of the Logos could, however, be embodied in humans, and thus Philo portrayed Moses as having been the most perfect receptacle of God’s Logos in human history. Moses is the closest Philo came to ‘incarnating’ his Logos, and this gave him his own brand of ‘divine’ hero. Philo made Moses the prime human mediator between God and the world, the one who had received God’s wisdom and revealed it to humanity through the Jewish scriptures. (Not surprisingly, Moses in Philo’s hands comes across as a committed Middle Platonist.)

A divine-by-proxy Moses satisfied Philo’s need for an accessible personal deity. But certain other Jews did not feel the same rigid restrictions toward God, and could envision their own hero as a separate divine being beside him in heaven. From the Logos of Greek philosophy and Philo’s Platonized Judaism to Paul’s Christ Jesus is scarcely a stone’s throw.

The Logos and Christ

It would be impossible here to give a summary of Philo’s philosophy which in any case he never laid out in orderly fashion. (Nor is it free from the occasional contradiction.) But we can look at some of the things he says about the Logos and note the obvious points of contact with Christian ideas.

As E. R. Goodenough describes it in *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (1935)—a profoundly original if imperfect feat of scholarship, ahead of its time and viewed with mistrust by lesser minds—the Logos was likened by Philo (and other strands of Hellenistic philosophy) to a stream of Light-Radiation issuing from God, with stages of decreasing brilliance, forming a hierarchy of God’s powers and activities. Such spilling out of the Godhead into subsidiary essences was a part of the ancient development of philosophy about Deity; it eventually led to the fantastical inventions of Gnosticism, the teeming “*pleroma*” (fullness of God) populating heaven and even breaking out into the lower world. Philo is not consistent in how he applies the term Logos within his picture of the various emanations of God, for he was not a precise, systematic thinker. How he handled his concepts in any given piece of writing may

have been dependent on his latest mystical experience. But the shape of his depictions can generally be seen as determined by features of the Jewish cult, even Jewish history and geography, since Philo was anxious to show that the workings of God and the universe were reflected in Judaism and Jewish experience.

Like most Hellenistic philosophers, Philo believed that the ultimate God was unknowable and indefinable. Humanity could reach and understand him only through his emanations. The Logos was God's mediator, his thought expressed in a comprehensible form. This was the fundamental religious need of the age, and Paul's Christ, as well as the later Gospel Jesus, filled this basic role as the Son revealing the Father. For Philo, this emanation, this Logos, was not a separate divine being. Rather, it was the point of contact with God, just as the Sun's radiated light and heat is the part of the Sun we experience, the Sun itself being unreachable.

Philo described the Logos as the "image" of God. It was God's "first-begotten," the primary of his emanations. Through this "eldest son" God produced everything else. The Logos was the instrument of God's creation. In an idea derived from Stoicism, the Logos became the binding power which made everything in the universe cohere and function. Again like Stoicism, the Logos was the divine seed within humans; as the Logos was God's Son, all human beings were God's "sons." Occasionally, Philo merged this pervading Logos-force with the Jewish Law in its ideal, spiritual form.

In Christian expression, one can find common ground with Philo at almost every turn. Paul calls Christ the "image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4); through him we become "God's sons" (Galatians 4:5-7). The Law—for Paul a new one, superseding the old—is embodied in Christ. Christ is the instrument of creation ("through whom all things came to be and we through him": 1 Corinthians 8:6). The writer of Colossians (1:15-20) also calls the Son "the image of the invisible God . . . in him everything in heaven and earth was created . . . and all things are held together in him." The Epistle to the Hebrews, in a profusion of Platonic imagery (1:2-3), declares the Son to be "the heir to the whole universe, and through whom he [God] created all orders of existence: the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendor and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by his word of power" (NEB). And so on. None of it, of course, is identified with any Jesus of Nazareth or human preacher of the Kingdom.

Even the later Trinity has its predecessor in Philo's occasional grouping of the powers of God into three, and his other hierarchies of the divine emanations. Philo stresses that these are aspects within a single unity. In more than one of his works (e.g., *On Dreams*, ii.28) Philo styles the Logos as "high priest," prefiguring Hebrews' central view of the heavenly Christ. Neither Paul nor Hebrews uses the actual term "Logos," but their Christ bears all the characteristics of this divine entity who is one step removed from the Father.

Some claim that Christianity is distinct from Philo and other Hellenistic philosophies in having its Son incarnated to earth, turning him into a personal Savior. But Philo created his own Savior figure in Moses, in whom the Logos had been instilled. Although Moses was not presented as strictly divine himself (though some commentators suggest that Philo virtually does this), it was through the Logos within him that Moses provided humanity with knowledge and accessibility to God, and thus salvation. For Philo, salvation came through the attainment of mystic communion with God, to be achieved in ultimate form upon death. Compare Paul in Philippians 1:23: "I would like to depart (the flesh) and be with Christ."

Philo even penned a prayer to Moses, one that bears a close resemblance to prayers addressed by Christian mystics to Christ:

“O Sacred Guide, be our prompter and preside over our steps . . . conduct us to the hidden light of hallowed words . . . display to us the loveliness invisible to the uninitiate.”
(*On Dreams*, i.167)

Moses had experienced, so Philo says (*Questions and Answers on Genesis*, ii.46), a second birth which had no mother, but only “the Father of all.” And at his death, Moses underwent a transfiguration and passed, pure light, into the presence of God. The parallels to all this in the Christian portrayal of Christ scarcely need spelling out.

In heaven itself, Philo sees the Logos as “a continual supplicant to the immortal God on behalf of mortal man” (*Divine Matters*, 205): this is one of Christ’s roles, one exactly paralleled in 1 John 2:1. The role Philo did not assign to his Logos, however, nor to Moses, was a sacrificial one. Paul and the branch of the Christ movement he represented needed an atoner, a sacrifice for sin—or perhaps, at an earlier stage than Paul (represented by the Philippians hymn), a paradigmatic suffering figure whose exaltation would guarantee the believers’ own. Ultimately, Christianity became the embodiment of the suffering Savior idea, and this was its greatest “advance” (if we may style it such) on Philo and Hellenistic philosophy generally. Philo, on the other hand, represents Jewish optimism and positive theology at its best, although part of this is due to a healthy dose of the Greek spirit.

Jewish Personified Wisdom

The quotation given above from the Epistle to the Hebrews is very close to a passage from the most important non-Philonic document to survive from Hellenistic Judaism, one which was almost certainly written in Alexandria during Philo’s lifetime, though it is not by him. This is the Wisdom of Solomon, included in the Apocrypha section of most Old Testaments. The unknown writer of this work came at the end of a long line of Jewish thinking about the figure of divine Wisdom.

Judaism had its own intermediary figure going back centuries, certainly as old as Plato. For the Jews, God never became quite so inaccessible, but among the scribes of the period following the Exile, God was presented as making himself known and working in the world through a part of himself they called “Wisdom”. This was no “Son” of God, however, for the figure of Wisdom was a female. (The grammatical gender of “wisdom” in Hebrew is feminine.) It is possible that one of her pre-Exilic antecedents was as female consort to Yahweh, under the influence of surrounding Semitic religions.

Wisdom took on a status and personality of her own. Some scholars claim that she was never anything more than a poetic personification of certain activities of God, but the language used of her speaks more than this. Helmer Ringgren, whose seminal book *Word and Wisdom* (1947) is widely cited in this field, says (p.104) that Wisdom was not an abstraction but “a concrete being, self-existent beside God.”

Personified Wisdom also represents part of a widespread tendency in Near Eastern religions to strip off certain aspects of a deity and turn them into separate divine figures. They began life simply as qualities of a higher god, but gradually, as more was said and thought about them, they took on a life of their own. This was not an expression of the “intermediary” phenomenon; the higher gods were not transcendent. They simply delegated authority too efficiently and lost parts of themselves in the process. (These separated aspects are called “hypostases” and the process “hypostatization”. We see an intermediate form of hypostatization in the “Word” and “Beloved” of the Odes of Solomon; a fully formed one in the Christ Jesus of Paul and early Christianity.)

Wisdom may also have been pushed into the spotlight by a scribal establishment which wanted to counter a fascination for the Phoenician goddess Ishtar. The latter's sexual persona and licentious cult had long exerted an influence in Israel. One way to undercut the intruder's appeal was to borrow her features and turn them into something that could be approved of and controlled. The figure of Wisdom probably owes something to an expurgated Ishtar.

Wisdom developed her own "myths" about coming to earth, although there was never any thought of her being physically incarnated. Here is what the Old Testament Book of Proverbs has to say about her:

"By the gate, Wisdom calls aloud: 'Men, it is to you I call . . . I am Wisdom, I bestow shrewdness, and show the way to knowledge and prudence. [Ishtar had also stood by the gate of her temple, though her seductive call had been to something a little more provocative.] . . . The Lord created me the beginning of his works . . . when he set the heavens in their place I was there . . . I was at the Lord's side each day . . . Happy is the man who keeps to my ways.'" (From 8:1-36)

Two important aspects of Wisdom are featured here. First, she is "pre-existent," that is, she was with God in heaven before the creation of the world. And she is associated with God in that work. An earlier verse, 3:19, makes it clear that Wisdom serves as an instrument in the process of creation:

"In wisdom the Lord founded the earth and by understanding he set the heavens in their place."

These are two of the primary attributes given to the spiritual Christ in the thought of Paul, pre-existence and a role in creation, and they were current in other circles as well.

Baruch 3:37 gives us a line which, even though originally intended as a reference to the Torah (the "Law" contained in the five biblical books of Moses which mainstream rabbinic thought identified with Wisdom), may have had a profound influence on the future:

"Thereupon wisdom appeared on earth and lived among men."

Was this one of the footsteps on the path to bringing a different "hypostasis" of God—the Son—down to earth? Perhaps the writer of the hymn to the Logos which was adapted as a Prologue to the final version of the Gospel of John turned it into a song of the incarnation: "So the Logos (Word) became flesh and dwelt among us." (1:14)

On the other hand, the writer of one of the documents which went into the composite 1 Enoch, end product of some first century Jewish apocalyptic sect, took a more pessimistic view of Wisdom's sojourn on earth (42:1-2):

"Then wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling-place. So wisdom returned to her place and she settled permanently among the angels."

Did Greek philosophy influence the early evolution of the Jewish Wisdom figure? It's difficult to tell. But by the time we get to the Wisdom of Solomon we can see a clear and exotic blending of Wisdom with the Logos. Wisdom is now the divine power active in the world, the spirit that pervades and governs all things. She is the Logos, but without the name. She is God's "throne-

partner,” a step away from Christ sitting at the right hand of God. She, too, is pre-existent, an agent of creation. And consider this passage from 7:22-30:

“ . . . she rises from the power of God, a pure effluence of the glory of the Almighty . . . She is the brightness that streams from everlasting light, the flawless mirror of the active power of God and the image of his goodness . . . She spans the world in power from end to end, and orders all things benignly.”

Such thinking is clearly reflected in those opening verses (see above) of the Epistle to the Hebrews, defining the nature of the Son as “the effulgence of God’s splendor,” the image of God and the sustainer of the universe. This document comes either from Alexandria or from some Palestinian circle with close connections to the Egyptian city and its philosophy. The christological hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 (also noted above) is stamped with the same kind of imagery as well: the Son as the pre-existent image of God, a force which created the universe and now holds it together.

Paul himself tells us that Christ “is the very image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4), and in 1 Corinthians 8:6 he has this to say:

“For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all being comes . . . and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came to be and we through him.”

Paul and other early writers are speaking of Christ in exactly the same language as we find in the broader philosophical world, both Greek and Jewish. Their idea of the spiritual Son has absorbed both the features and roles of the Logos and personified Wisdom. In reading scripture and imagining he is being inspired to a view of God’s Son, Paul is drawing on the prominent ideas of his day and the deeper heritage which lay behind them.

Scholars largely recognize this, of course, but claim that all these current ideas were *applied* to Jesus of Nazareth, that they were “interpretations” of him. Apart from wondering how such a process could have taken place in a Jewish milieu, the writings themselves give us no hint that such a process of interpretation of a human man is being undertaken. One also wonders how such an interpretation could be conducted, by so many writers in so many documents, without once identifying the object of the interpretation. (See “Postscript” in the Main Articles for a fuller discussion of this question.)

D. Moody Smith has noted (in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* under “Logos”) that “it is not immediately obvious why a man sent from God, even the Messiah of Israel, should have played such a role,” referring to the Logos’ role as God’s agent in creating the world. He is so right. To consider that Jews, no less, could assign to a crucified preacher the creation of the universe is nothing short of ludicrous. But of course they did nothing of the sort. They assigned that role to the spiritual Son in heaven, just as thinkers before them had assigned it to God’s Wisdom and others to the intermediary Logos. The historical man entered the picture only when the heavenly Son was later thought to have come to earth and lived a life whose details could be found in scripture.

The Wisdom of Solomon also shows us that the time was ripe for the Logos and Wisdom to make a journey into the world. The earlier Lady Wisdom of Proverbs who “stood by the gate and called” is undoubtedly speaking metaphorically, in a spiritual sense, for the period immediately after the Exile would have been too early to envision even the concept of incarnation. But by the turn of the era, among both Jews and Greeks, the need for a transcendent God to send his representative, his revealer, was being acutely felt. So much of the world was unfathomable.

Wars, strife and evil spirits seemed to be winning. Humanity desperately looked for aid, direction and outright salvation. The need is reflected in lines like these, although this writer's hallmark is one of optimism (Wisdom of Solomon, 9:10):

"Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from thy glorious throne bid her come down, so that she may labor at my side and I may learn what pleases thee."

In some Jewish circles, Wisdom was seen as doing just that. She was thought of as sending "envoys," entrusting them with teachings which revealed God, his wishes and his workings. The extensive wisdom literature of the scriptures and other writings was seen as inspired by personified Wisdom. Sometimes these were presented as her direct words, as in parts of the Odes of Solomon. The group who produced the first layers of the document Q also worked as Wisdom's envoys (see Part Three of the Main Articles), and they developed the idea in a new direction which fed into the creation of the historical Jesus.

Paul's Christ had also been sent forth, the divine Son who was the medium of God's revelation, whom Paul calls "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). In some dimension, this Son had performed a redeeming act. As yet, all this had happened in spiritual ways, in spiritual dimensions. Soon this would not be sufficient.

In Hellenistic Synagogues

Before leaving Alexandria with its array of Christian progenitors, we can take a short look at a set of writings which seem to contain within themselves the marks of evolution, charting the growth of the Christian organism from womb to childhood. Here are telltale marks of the missing links in the fossil record. Fittingly, these writings are buried within later Christian ground, the Apostolic Constitutions of the fourth century.

Almost a hundred years ago it was recognized that many of the Christian prayers found in Books 7 and 8 of this compilation of church laws and liturgy are derived from much earlier Jewish synagogal prayers. In many cases, Christian phrases have been crudely spliced into originals which clearly lacked any Christian content. These interpolations can vary from a few basic words, such as "through Jesus your Son," to several lines which offer material based on the Gospels. Some seem more primitive than others and the whole process undoubtedly took place over a long period of time, reflecting several stages in the evolution of Christ belief.

Goodenough (*By Light, Light*, p.306f) and others find similarities in the prayers to Philo's environment of Hellenistic Judaism and place them in Alexandria. Others (such as D. A. Fiensy, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol 2, p.671f) offer the synagogues of Syria as an alternate home for this liturgy. What is particularly intriguing in these prayers is not the obvious, Gospel-derived additions made by full-blown Christianity at a later stage, but the more subtle features which point to earlier stages of development.

Alongside, for example, a type of insertion which names Christ and Jesus, there stand references to God's "Word" or Logos, both types filling a similar role. Passages like "All creatures being made by thy Logos" and "Thou art the Father . . . the cause of the creation by a Mediator" (*Apostolic Constitutions* VII, 35, vv. 5 & 10) seem part of the original layer, the product of Jewish circles which saw, like Philo, creation taking place through a more abstract principle; whereas another passage in a different prayer (VII, 36, v.1) has brought this idea to the next, more specifically Christian stage: "O Lord . . . you created the cosmos through Christ." (Christ, at this stage, may still be a non-historical figure.)

The original prayers (e.g., VIII, 12, v.7) praise God for begetting

“thy only Son, God the Logos, the living Sophia, the first-born of every creature, the angel of Thy great counsel and Thy High-Priest, but the King and Lord of every intellectual and sensible nature, who was before all things, by whom were all things.”

(In the Apostolic Constitutions, this prayer is placed in the mouth of the Gospel James, son of Zebedee!)

By the absence of any specific insertion attaching such ideas to a Jesus (historical or otherwise), we can see this as a reflection of a very Philonic-type philosophy having nothing to do with Christianity, despite close parallels to some New Testament expression. From this early stage of Logos, Sophia and Mediator, we see the “Son” progressing to the names “Christ” and “Jesus” and later to the Gospel mythology as later developments were overlaid on the earlier liturgy. Thus, succeeding layers exist side by side in these prayers.

The prayers in their original Jewish form are commonly dated no earlier than the middle of the second century (as, for example, by Fiensy, *op.cit.*, p.673), but this is inconclusive. Because some vocabulary suggests familiarity with the Aquila version of the Greek Old Testament, published around 135 CE, does not mean that some or all of the prayers do not have earlier versions or roots; nor would all of them have been written at the same time. The Philonic and Wisdom elements, in fact, seem very close to the Alexandria of the turn of the era. Nor is there anything to prevent the transmission (recopying) of texts having included alterations in wording, something common to all early Christian documentation. If interpolations can be made, so can an updating to new and familiar vocabulary. (If this was the case here, it was fortunately not done consistently.)

It follows from all this that there is something wrong with the standard view which sees these prayers as having been “taken over” from Jewish sources by later Christian groups and altered as was seen fit or necessary. The prayer from which the above quote is drawn (the one attributed to James) would hardly lend itself naturally to a Christian sect professing Jesus of Nazareth. If for some reason the members of such a sect had adopted an extraneous Jewish hymnal of this sort, they would likely have altered it more thoroughly to make it more relevantly Christian. No, if such material was in use by Christian groups, it can only be because it was felt to be natural as it was, which means that such modes of expression had to lie in their own background. To put it another way, such liturgy suggests that Christian groups grew out of the Hellenistic Jewish groups who had originally produced it; they were Jews who adopted “Christ belief,” that is, focusing the older Son-Logos-Wisdom philosophy onto a spiritual Messiah who was becoming more personalized, more sophisticated—eventually one who had been physically incarnated and suffered death. (This process of evolution within a particular group can be seen in my analysis of the evolution of thought about the Son in the epistle 1 John: see Supplementary Article No. 2: A Solution to the First Epistle of John.)

These changes in theology came in over time, and corresponding changes to the liturgy were made only as was felt necessary. Earlier expressions would tend to be reinterpreted along the new lines and still be considered relevant, not always requiring a change of wording. If “Christ” grew out of the Logos and Sophia, such earlier terminology could often be allowed to stand.

One of the more extreme insertions (VII, 38, v.7) thanks God (“through Christ”) because “you have delivered us from the heresy of the Christ-murderers.” Such an interpolation is indication of the adaptation of these prayers over time. For if a Christian group felt such an animosity toward Jews at the outset, it would hardly be likely to adopt a set of Jewish prayers in the first place.

Certainly it would not let stand all the pro-Jewish sentiments which permeate the vast portion of the liturgy. Only by postulating an evolving community which has integrated these prayers into its own identity and expression, finally to arrive at such an anti-Jewish attitude in a later stage, can we understand such a situation.

The Womb of Christianity?

Rather than the product of a proselytizing incursion from Jerusalem arising out of a single event and historical figure, Alexandrian Christ belief is revealed as a philosophical evolution within more adventuresome Jewish-Hellenistic circles in that city. In fact, Alexandrian Christianity in its first century and a half seems to have gone down its own path, one leading in a gnostic direction. As Walter Bauer has pointed out in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (p.44), the first sign of an “orthodox” ecclesiastical presence in Egypt comes only toward the end of the second century. The tradition recorded by Eusebius that the apostle Mark preached in Egypt, establishing churches and a line of bishops, is highly suspect as a fabrication designed to fill the void, not much more dependable than Eusebius’ declaration that Philo had contacted St. Peter in Rome!

Instead, can we postulate a more cogent force working in the other direction? The Epistle to the Hebrews, though generally regarded as a Palestinian (or perhaps Syrian) product, is clearly cast in the Philonic-style mold of Middle Platonism. It surely owes some of its lofty sentiment to Alexandrian influence. And what Jewish-Hellenistic milieu gave rise to Paul’s view of the spiritual Christ? If Acts’ tradition that Paul came from Tarsus is correct, it might make northern Syria, centered on Antioch, the immediate melting pot for Paul’s ideas. Edessa, nearby, may have produced the Odes of Solomon, perhaps a little later than Paul. But traffic, in ideas and much else, between Alexandria and Antioch, passing through Palestine in the middle, was a natural state of affairs in the ancient world, and if the teeming ideas of Philo’s city, even of Philo himself or the circle he worked in, overflowed in well-worn northerly directions, Alexandria may in fact have been the womb of Christianity.

This traffic had been going on for well over a century, and the development of a divine intermediary concept within certain Jewish circles could have been simmering for some time all over the Levant, until Philo brought things to a boil, perhaps laying the ground for the birth of a new movement. That currents moved outward from Alexandria is evidenced by Paul and Acts, in their picture of the apostle Apollos. “Powerful in his use of the scriptures,” (says Acts 18:24), Apollos represents an intermediate stage, a step beyond Philo’s impersonal Logos, for he seems to have preached a “Wisdom” Messiah, a spiritual revealer of knowledge. His message was claimed to confer an immediate resurrection and salvation upon the Corinthian enthusiasts (see Supplementary Article No. 1: “Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate”).

But Apollos had little sympathy for a rival brand of preachers who had derived a very different Christ from their reading of scripture, especially that troublesome little fellow from points east who had gotten to the Corinthians a bit sooner and talked them into accepting a Messiah on a cross, a Son who had died and risen from the dead—a foolish bit of so-called wisdom. No doubt the proud Apollos, from the shining city of the Nile delta where learning was second to none and the great ideas of the age were generated, would have been greatly astonished to realize that he himself would end up as a footnote in history, while the dark novelties of the tenacious Paul of Tarsus would eventually go on to mold the faith of the Western world for the next two millennia.

The Source Of Paul's Gospel

The Idea of "Reception" (*paralambano*) in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 11:23 and Galatians 1:12

The Call of An Apostle

Paul lives in a world of divine revelation. He moves amid wide-ranging and diverse circles of apostles who preach the Christ, none of whom show any sign of tracing their authority or knowledge about such a divine figure back to a ministry on earth, or to a group of apostles who had been participants and witnesses of that ministry. As I discussed in my first Supplementary Article ("Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate"), neither Paul nor any other writer among the New Testament epistles gives us evidence of the concept of apostolic tradition, or of the idea that anyone had known Jesus personally. The latter idea is notably missing in Paul's direct references to the Jerusalem apostles, with whom he has important disputes; and it is equally missing in his discussions of the question of who is to be considered a legitimate apostle.

In 1 Corinthians 9:1 Paul asks plaintively: "Am I not an apostle? Did I not see Jesus our Lord?" It would seem that for Paul the mark of the true apostle is the reception of the proper visionary revelation and authority from God. In 2 Corinthians 10 to 12, Paul defends his apostleship and compares himself to unnamed rivals (they are not from the Jerusalem group) who are competing for the Corinthians' allegiance: "Someone is convinced, is he, that he belongs to Christ? Let him think again, and reflect that we belong to Christ as much as he does" (10:7). And he goes on in 11:4 to reveal the source of all these competing messages and claims to legitimacy:

For if someone comes who proclaims another Jesus . . . if you receive a spirit different from the spirit already given to you, or a gospel different from the gospel you have already accepted . . .

Paul operates in a world of perceived revelation from God, populated by self-appointed apostles who learn about the Christ, and formulate their own interpretations of him, through the Spirit.

In all of his arguments over the legitimacy of his position, Paul never addresses the issue in this way: "Yes, I know others were appointed by Jesus in his earthly ministry, but the way in which I was called is just as worthy . . ." Had there been such a thing as appointment by Jesus, can we believe that this, or a link to those who had been so appointed, would not be the ever-present benchmark by which all apostles were measured? Could Paul possibly have ignored such a standard throughout the debates in which he engages concerning apostolic legitimacy? In fact, Paul's arguments reject the very idea that there could be any deficiency of qualification on his part. And the implication of 1 Corinthians 9:1 is that, since his "seeing" of the Lord is to be regarded as legitimizing his apostleship and this "seeing" was entirely visionary, the legitimacy of the others he is comparing himself to, which includes the Jerusalem apostles, is based on the same measure, namely visionary revelation.

That this is the universal standard is clear from 2 Corinthians 10:18. Paul declares: "It is not the man who recommends himself, but the man whom the Lord recommends." There is no suggestion of a separate basis of authority or pre-eminence based on having known and been chosen by a Jesus on earth. Here "Lord" refers to God (cf. 3:4-6), which is in keeping with the way Paul regularly expresses himself about his call to preach the gospel. Acts has so imposed on Christian consciousness the legend of the dramatic event on the road to Damascus that it comes as a surprise that Paul nowhere refers to such an experience. (Note that Paul's vision of the Christ mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:8 is not described as a conversion experience, and the

Damascus road event is notably missing in his reference to “visions and revelations” in 2 Corinthians 12:1f.)

In fact, Paul consistently tells us that it was God himself who called him to be an apostle. In 1 Corinthians 1:1, “the will and call of God” has led him to preach. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4, he is “approved by God.” It is God, in 2 Corinthians 3:6, who qualified Paul to dispense his new covenant, God’s actions which made him an apostle to the gentiles in Galatians 2:8. (Those same actions of God also made Peter an apostle to the Jews!) As for his knowledge of the Christ, Paul tells his readers in Galatians 1:16 that it was God who revealed his Son to him, not Jesus who revealed himself.

Even the pseudo-Pauline writers express things in the same vein. It is the “commission God gave me,” in Colossians 1:25. Paul is commissioned “by the will of God” in Ephesians 1:1; in 3:7 he is “made a minister by God’s gifts and powers.” Whenever all these passages were penned, it is difficult to imagine that the writers possessed any concept that Jesus had called or appointed apostles, whether on earth or even through spiritual channels. In fact, Paul clearly excludes such an idea in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “In the church, God has appointed in the first place apostles . . .” No writer who had the Gospel picture before his mind could possibly have said such a thing.

The gospel which apostles like Paul preach is likewise never said to have had its source in Jesus or his ministry. Paul constantly refers to the “gospel of God” (Romans 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:2); 1 Peter 4:17 condemns those “who refuse to obey the gospel of God.” Occasionally, Christ is the *object* of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 3:2), but its source is consistently God himself, and it comes to the minds of apostles like Paul through the channel of God’s Spirit.

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people to whom it came? If anyone claims to be inspired or a prophet, let him recognize that what I write has the Lord’s authority. [1 Corinthians 14:36-38]

A Gospel of Prime Importance

The above verses from 1 Corinthians come a few sentences before a passage which many regard as the most important in all the Pauline epistles. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul states his basic gospel, following it with a list of “appearances” of the risen Christ to various people in Jerusalem, culminating in Paul’s own, similar experience. Where did Paul get all of this information?

First let’s take a preliminary look at verses 3 to 8 and get a sense of their structure and the elements which make up the passage:

- 3 For I delivered to you, as of prime importance, what also I received:
that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,
4 and that he was buried,
and that he has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures,
5 and that he was seen (*ophthe*) by Cephas, then by the twelve;
6 afterward he was seen by over 500 brothers at one time, most of whom
are still alive, though some have fallen asleep;
7 afterward he was seen by James, then by all the apostles;
8 last of all, as to one abnormally born, he was seen by me as well.**

On the face of it, the passage could be divided into three parts (the three indentations above):

- (i) the introductory line (verse 3a),*
- (ii) the three elements of the gospel about Christ: death, burial and raising (verses 3b and 4)*
- (iii) verses 5 to 8, enumerating the “seeings” (ophthe is a past tense [aorist] passive of the verb horao, to see, here meaning “to become visible to, appear to, be seen by”).*

One of the principal challenges in analyzing this passage, something which scholars have long recognized, is to decide the relationship between parts two and three. As the sentence is structured (it is a single one in the Greek), everything seems to follow on the main verb “delivered” in verse 3a. But do all the elements of what follows have a similar weight and meaning?

Let’s glance back to verses 1 and 2 which lead into this passage. There Paul says to the Corinthians:

Now, I remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received (from me), on which you have taken your stand, through which you are saved if you hold firm to the word I preached to you, or else you have believed in vain.

When we add to these sentiments the phrase in verse 3a, “of prime importance,” we realize that Paul is referring to a message, a doctrine, which is so crucial in his mind that he sees salvation dependent upon it. It should immediately become clear that all of the information following on the “delivered” of verse 3 cannot possibly assume an equal weight. A belief on the part of the Corinthians that Paul had in fact seen the Christ, or that 500 of the brothers had done so, can hardly be said to be crucial to their salvation, nor can it be suggested that Paul had such an idea in mind. Indeed, some have felt that it is more than faintly distasteful to regard any of the appearances as having equal rank with the statements about the Christ, that they were an equal part of Paul’s “gospel of first importance.” There must be a division in emphasis, even in character, between what comes before, and what comes after, the “and that” which begins verse 5.

Is there a way to see the two sets of information, the 3-element gospel of the Christ and the list of appearances, as following a logical sequence of thought in Paul’s mind, each having a certain degree of “importance”? (We can consider that both had previously been told to the Corinthians and that Paul decides to remind them of both.)

Considering how Paul habitually uses the term “gospel”—as something received from God through the Spirit, a message proclaimed by the apostles of his day each according to the revelation he claims to have enjoyed—the nature of the second set of information would hardly fit that category. And yet it could have been regarded by Paul as an important element of what he has told the Corinthians. For him (regardless of the reasons for the list forming as a unit of tradition in the first place, if it is pre-Pauline), it may have been in the nature of ‘supporting’ material, a witness to the veracity of the gospel itself, or perhaps a pointer to the power and presence of the Christ about whom such doctrines were being preached.

It is common knowledge that when self-styled prophets, including modern evangelists, make their claims to speak with the voice of God, they inevitably support and justify their claims by an appeal to personal experiences of that God, to wonders or miracles they have known of or been a part of. Though other motives may be involved in Paul’s enumeration of all these revelatory experiences, the need to ‘support’ the doctrine could well be the principal purpose for including

them in his preaching and his reminder here, and for stressing them as “important,” even if they are not on a par with the gospel itself, nor crucial for salvation.

A second observation needs to be made about the list of appearances. There is nothing to suggest that, in Paul’s mind, they were not all of the same nature. And since neither Paul himself, nor anyone on his behalf down to the present day, has ever claimed that his “seeing” of the Christ was anything but a vision of a spiritual figure, this has to imply that Paul regards the other appearances as being in the same category. In other words, they were all revelatory experiences; none were thought of as encounters with a bodily-risen Jesus of Nazareth. (This has recently been recognized by modern liberal scholars such as the Jesus Seminar and John Shelby Spong.)

Indeed, the language Paul uses implies this very meaning. Even the sense of “vision” may be too strong. In a study of the meaning of *ophthe* here, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. V, p. 358) points out that in this type of context the word is a technical term for being “in the presence of revelation as such, without reference to the nature of its perception.” In other words, the “seeing” may not refer to actual sensory or mental perception. Rather, it may simply be “an encounter with the risen Lord who reveals himself...they experienced his presence.” If what we have here is more an experience of Christ’s “presence” than a full-blown hallucinatory vision, this would make it easier to accept that so many individuals and even large groups could imagine they had undergone such an experience.

It is far from clear, therefore, that Paul in 15:5-8 is describing anything more than a series of experiences in which many people, most of them within a group already formed for a religious purpose, felt a conviction of faith in the spiritual Christ, experiences which may well have grown in the telling.

I might point out in passing that this not only eliminates Easter, it means that there is no necessary chronological proximity between Jesus’ “raising” and the list of visions, in fact no sequential connection at all. The death and resurrection (and even the “burial,” though it has been suggested, e.g., by Jean Héring, that this phrase may be a later addition) can be entirely mythological, revealed through the sacred writings; Paul’s repeated phrase “according to the scriptures” could be so interpreted. These people, at the time of the beginning of the movement, simply experienced a revelation of or about the Christ and his spirit world activities.

Reception and Transmission

But we have thus far passed over the most important—and contentious—element of this 1 Corinthians passage, and analyzing it will carry us beyond this chapter, even beyond this epistle. Consider once again verse 3a:

For I delivered (paredoka) to you . . . what also I received (parelabon) . . .

The first verb in the Greek is the past tense (aorist) of *paradidomi*: to hand over, to pass on, to deliver; the second, of *paralambano*: to receive, take over, learn or acknowledge. Commentators are quite right in pointing out that this pair of words is often, even usually, technical language for the receiving and passing on of tradition along a human chain of teaching and transmitted heritage. This sense is unmistakably present in the first verb of this passage. Paul is passing on his teaching to the Corinthians, and to everyone else he preaches to. But does it apply to the second verb, the “received” element?

The perusal of that question involves several interlocking elements. First, consider one of the difficulties we face if, along with almost all commentators past and present (operating on the

assumptions of the Gospel picture), we regard the “receiving” as referring to the reception by Paul of this doctrine and information from others, from apostles before him, and presumably from those who are supposed to have known Jesus.

The difficulty is that it would make nonsense of verse 8. As noted above, the list of appearances are seemingly of a piece, including Paul’s. Yet if Paul is speaking of things he learned from others, this would hardly encompass his own experience of the Christ. This problem, however, is not so serious since, as I have just argued above and will enlarge on shortly, we don’t have to hold Paul to the strict letter of his statements.

The main problem, however, is decidedly serious. Quite apart from the specific verb being used and any claims as to its usual meaning, we need to compare ideas expressed by Paul in two different passages, the one here in 1 Corinthians 15:3, and another in Galatians 1:11-12:

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not the product of men. For I did not receive (parelabon, from paralambano) it from any man, nor was I taught it, but (I received it) through a revelation of/about Jesus Christ.

Paul could not make himself any clearer. The gospel he preaches is not something passed on through human channels. He “did not receive it from any man.” If the verb “received” in 1 Corinthians 15:3 is claimed to represent such a thing, then the statements in the two passages stand in direct contradiction to one another. Given his passionate declaration in Galatians, it is not likely that Paul would turn around and say to the Corinthians that he in fact got his gospel “from men.”

Certain scholars in the past have tried to get around this incompatibility. They claim that Paul must have two different gospels in mind in the two passages, or perhaps different interpretations or emphases. But the words themselves allow for no such distinctions. The stated gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is pretty basic stuff, the essentials for salvation. In Galatians, the “gospel” is not spelled out, but the starkness of the language more than suggests that Paul is speaking of his basic preaching, and this is borne out by the preceding verses. There he admonishes the Galatians (v.6) for turning away and “following a different gospel,” declaring: “If anyone preaches a gospel different from what you received (from me), let him be cursed!” Taken with verses 11-12, this can hardly be anything other than his bottom-line preaching of the dead and risen Christ, as enunciated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

We are entitled to assume the strong likelihood that Paul would be consistent in his statements about the source of his gospel, namely that it is something he received through revelation, regardless of the particular verb he uses. The unambiguous nature of the passionate declaration in Galatians must be allowed to govern the meaning in 1 Corinthians 15:3. And as we saw by the early part of this article, such an interpretation is perfectly in keeping with all that Paul says about the spirit of his times and the dynamics of the early Christian preaching movement. We noted the complete absence of apostolic tradition, any idea of information or authority passed on through a chain going back to Jesus himself.

Instead, each apostle’s doctrine and knowledge of the Christ comes through the Spirit, through revelation from God. It is God who has called Paul, God who supplies the gospel about his Son. Remember that Paul just before the passage in 15:1-4 has spoken in no uncertain terms of divine communication: “Did the word of God originate with you? Are you the only ones to whom it came?” With such sentiments hanging in the air, what source can we assume Paul is speaking of when he goes directly on to state the saving gospel he has “received”?

To secure this conclusion, however, we must be able to see the actual verb Paul uses, *paralambano*, as compatible with the idea of divine revelation. Two considerations tell us that it is. The first is how Paul uses the verb in the Galatians passage. Let's look again at the key verse 1:12:

For I did not receive (parelabon) it (his gospel) from any man, nor was I taught it, but (I received it) through a revelation (apokalypseos) of/about Jesus Christ.

Paul makes our task a little less than automatic, since he does not actually repeat the verb in the last phrase. But we all do this sort of thing in speech and writing, and when we do, the natural understanding is that we are silently supplying a verb we have just used, not something else. The understood verb in the final phrase above cannot be the "taught" verb just preceding it, since this would be in clear contradiction to the idea of revelation (*apokalypseos*). We are left with the most natural understanding of "but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ," the "received" being the same verb Paul has used in the first phrase of the sentence, "I did not receive it from any man." And in fact, this is how most translators and commentators render it. Thus, in this one sentence, Paul has used the verb *paralambano* in the sense of receiving a passed on tradition, as well as in the sense of receiving a revelation.

The second consideration which makes *paralambano* compatible with the idea of divine revelation is its usage in the wider Graeco-Roman world. As long ago as Schweitzer it was recognized that: "In the language of the mysteries, *paralambano* and *paradidomi* signify the reception and communication of the revelation received in the mysteries" (*The Mysticism of St. Paul*, ET ed. 1956, p. 266). But to claim (as Schweitzer and others do) that Paul is not here being influenced by Hellenistic usages and conceptions is to beg the question, since such an immunity cannot be proven. In fact, it goes against common sense, if only because Paul was himself a Diaspora Jew and could hardly have led a life insulated from Hellenistic thought and expression.

Even in rabbinic usage, to which the most frequent appeal is made, the idea of "received" is not always confined to the idea of passed on teaching through human channels. Hyam Maccoby, in *Paul and Hellenism* (p. 91-2), refutes Joachim Jeremias' argument that *paralambano* corresponds to the Hebrew '*qibel*' which always refers to reception as part of passed on tradition. Maccoby proves that this is not so by quoting from the Mishna: "Moses received (*qibel*) the Torah from Sinai." Here we have "received" used in the sense of direct reception from the divinity himself. Thus, it would seem that nothing stands in the way of interpreting the "received" of 1 Corinthians 15:3a as meaning that Paul's gospel is a product of perceived revelation from God, based on Paul's reading of scripture, as he twice states.

Some might point a few lines ahead to verse 11, where Paul says: "This is what we all proclaim, and this is what you believed." But there is no problem here. Just because certain others preach a doctrine about the Christ which may be similar to Paul's own does not mean that he got it from them. If all Christian missionaries are dependent on divine revelation (those who come to similar conclusions are reading the same scriptural passages), Paul can claim his own personal channel in this regard. And he may well have his own particular twist on what others preach. "Dying for sin" may be a specific Pauline interpretation of the salvific purpose of the spiritual Christ's death.

The Gospel and the Appearances

Now we can reevaluate the full passage from verses 3 to 8. Let's repeat it here:

- 3 For I delivered to you, as of prime importance, what also I received:
that (*hoti*) Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,
4 and that (*kai hoti*) he was buried,
and that (*kai hoti*) he has been raised on the third day according
to the scriptures,
5 and that (*kai hoti*) he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve;
6 afterward he was seen by over 500 brothers at one time, most of whom
are still alive, though some have fallen asleep;
7 afterward he was seen by James, then by all the apostles;
8 last of all, as to one abnormally born, he was seen by me as well.**

Earlier we noted that if “received” were interpreted as a passed on tradition, this created a problem with verse 8, since Paul’s own vision could not be fitted into such an idea. In a similar way, we might face a corresponding problem if “received” is taken to refer to a divine revelation, for such an idea could not possibly include the visions of Peter and the rest, or even of Paul himself. This information can hardly be said to have come to Paul through a revelation. Except for his own, it is obvious that he has learned about these experiences from others.

But we have already determined that the list of appearances is to be separated in some very qualitative way from what comes before, since Paul would hardly rank such information at the same level as his gospel about the Christ, as beliefs “by which you are saved” (verse 2). If some sort of closure exists in Paul’s mind after verse 4, then the idea of “received” does not have to carry past that point, and thus interpreting it as referring to a divine revelation would not create a problem.

Can we go further with such a line of reasoning? On the face of it, the words do convey a sense of carryover. After all, the “and that” (*kai hoti*) stands plainly at the beginning of verse 5, in parallel with the previous *kai hoti*’s, creating the sense that the earlier idea which governed the statement of the gospel also continues to govern the rest of the passage. Unless we entertain the idea that something has happened to the links between these verses in scribal transmission, perhaps a misunderstanding by some later copyist which led to an emendation (something by no means impossible), we might face a potential anomaly here. But I think there is a simpler explanation.

One thing must be kept in mind when analyzing Paul’s letters, something which perhaps tends to be overlooked when trying to glean the meaning and intent of any epistle writer. We can pretty well assume that most of the letters of the New Testament are not carefully constructed treatises. (Hebrews is a notable exception and possibly some of Romans, perhaps Ephesians as well.) And Paul did not physically write his letters himself; he dictated them to a scribal companion. (One of these, a certain Tertius, adds his own greeting toward the end of the epistle to the Romans.)

What might Paul have been doing while he was dictating? For all we know, it may have been at the end of a long, tiring day. Perhaps there were distractions about. Perhaps he was taking a bath. To expect that every epistolary passage has been carefully considered with an eye to perfect clarity and sequence of thought is highly unrealistic. Paul may have asked the scribe to read back to him certain passages or even the entire epistle, but since the writing was done on a continuous papyrus scroll, he is not likely to have said, except under the direst of circumstances, “Redo that part, I didn’t quite express things properly.” Perhaps no review was done at all.

Thus, we can expect vagaries in the construction of sentences and the sequence of ideas, and indeed, there are clear instances in many epistles of such ‘slips between cup and lip.’ (The garbled sentence in Galatians 2:6 is a good example.) What kind of ‘slip’ may have occurred in this passage of 1 Corinthians 15?

**3 For I delivered to you...what also I received,
that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,
4 and that he was buried,
and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures,
5 and that he was seen by Cephas...(etc.)**

In this sequence of thought, the verb “delivered” is the governing one, while “received” is a secondary idea. It is the “delivered” word which introduces what Paul is going to say. He is dictating as the ideas come to him. We can be reasonably sure that there has been no advance planning or ‘outline’ to the letter. In the preceding verses, Paul has been talking about the gospel he preached which confers salvation. When he begins verse 3, the idea foremost in his mind is that he is going to remind the Corinthians of what that gospel was and is, and as he begins he also throws in the fact that he received it through revelation.

He then states the gospel in its three parts. By the time he has reached the end of what is now verse 4 and the scribe’s pen has caught up to him, we might speculate that it occurs to Paul also to remind his readers of the visions which testify to that gospel, to the spiritual Christ’s power and presence. These experiences of the living Christ legitimately follow on the governing verb “delivered,” for presumably he has in the past told the Corinthians of such visions. Thus, he can sensibly tack on another “and that” (*kai hoti*) and continue with this further information. He either forgets or ignores the fact that the listing of the visions does not logically follow on the “received,” but the latter was a secondary idea and anyway, this would hardly strike him as critical if he did realize it.

Everything from verse 3b on, the gospel and the supporting visions, follows in a logical sequence from the verb *paradidomi*; all were “of prime importance,” even if not equally so. The “received” idea, intentionally or not, has been abandoned after verse 4. When the scribe came to read it back to him (if he did), Paul may not have noticed, or cared. Perhaps he was washing his feet at the time.

Idle speculation? Of course. Some might call it a bit irreverent. But the point is, dashed-off letters that eventually get turned into holy writ do have a genesis, and we can be sure that it is more often than not a mundane and imperfect one. (For purposes of this argument, I have not taken into account the general consideration that passages in 1 Corinthians, as in any Pauline letter, may be later insertions or the result of various editorial emendations. Indeed, 1 Corinthians, in view of its very length and diversity of material, is a good candidate for being, at least in part, the end product of an accumulative or composite process.)

Learning of a Sacred Meal

When we balance 1 Corinthians 15:3 with Galatians 1:11-12, and take into account the picture Paul presents throughout his letters, we arrive at a compelling picture of an apostolic movement operating solely on divine inspiration. In such a context, Paul’s use of the verb *paralambano* can well mean “received through revelation.” But this conclusion reverberates through another important passage, also in 1 Corinthians, one no less critical to our whole evaluation of the nature of Paul’s Christianity.

In 11:23f, Paul introduces the one scene in all of his letters which seems to lift a curtain upon an incident in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He tells the Corinthians this story, in order to dissuade them from squabbling over the food and drink at their community's fellowship meal:

- 23 For I received from the Lord what also I delivered to you,
that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was “delivered up”
(most translations choose to render this “betrayed”
or “arrested”: see below),
took bread,
24 and having given thanks broke (it) and said:
this is my body, which is for you,
do this in remembrance of me.
25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup...**

That opening line is very like the one we examined in 1 Corinthians 15:3, only here the ideas are reversed. Now the “received” idea is the primary one and governs what follows. Are we to allot to this use of *paralambano* the same meaning as the one arrived at for 15:3? There are several logical and compelling reasons why we should.

Although the words of Jesus at the establishment of the Eucharist may not be part of Paul's fundamental “gospel,” we may well suspect that anything he preaches about the Christ would fall within the spirit of Galatians 1:11-12, Paul's firm declaration that he has received his message from “no man.” Certainly, his use of *paralambano* to refer to a revelation a few chapters later, in 15:3, does lend weight to the validity of such an interpretation here. But there are more immediate considerations we can draw on.

First, Paul plainly says that he received this “from the Lord.” If he is speaking of a passed on tradition from other men, Paul's words are on the surface illogical, even a falsehood. If other apostles gave him this information, presumably the ones who were present at such a scene, then he did not get it “from the Lord.” By clearly stressing that the Lord was the source of his information, Paul is denying any intermediate human step. Moreover, if such traditions about a Last Supper (Paul, alone in the New Testament, calls it “the Lord's Supper”) were circulating through Christian circles, including Corinth, by means of oral transmission and general knowledge, and were in fact the source of Paul's own familiarity with them, what kind of impression would Paul be giving his readers if he seemed to be claiming that he knew of these words through some personal revelation?

Perhaps recognizing all this, scholars have long tried to interpret the opening of verse 23 in a different way. We might call it “the battle of the prepositions.”

For I received from the Lord (apo tou kuriou) . . .

In the Greek of the time, when someone speaks of information received from another as the immediate, direct source, the preposition “*para*” is most often used. On the other hand, the preposition “*apo*” is most often used to signify the remote, or ultimate source of a piece of information. Thus Paul, they say, if he had meant to say that Jesus had delivered this information to him personally, would have used *para*. As it is, in using *apo*, he is referring to Jesus as the *originator* of these words, as if to say, “these words came ultimately from the Lord himself.”

Unfortunately for this argument, these different usages were not strict. (See Moulton: *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1 *Prolegomena*, p. 237.) Even the New Testament contains *apo* used in the opposite sense (Colossians 1:17, “as you learned from Ephaphras,” and

Matthew 11:29, “learn from me.”) Thus, there was no guarantee that the Corinthians would have understood such a “remote antecedent” meaning, or that Paul intended it.

Besides, if Jesus were being referred to only in the sense that he is the ultimate source of the words, this gives Paul’s statement another less than logical cast. If he is going to go on to say that Jesus spoke certain words, why preface it with a separate statement which identifies Jesus as the source of these words? This is at best a very awkward redundancy.

Thus, we must conclude that Paul is saying what the words seem to make him say: that this scene, which he has previously imparted to his readers, was the product of a private vision or inspiration coming from the heavenly Jesus. Once this is acknowledged, the way is open to regarding the scene Paul creates as a myth attached to the spiritual Christ, a myth designed to explain (as many myths do) the origins of a practice within the community, or at least, the origin of the significance that has now been attached to an older practice. To the meal of fellowship which is undoubtedly derived from the traditional Jewish thanksgiving meal, in a version (like the so-called “messianic banquet”) which has apocalyptic overtones (see 11:26), Paul has overlaid a sacramental significance based on a new interpretation of the meaning of the traditional bread and cup. This meaning is grounded in a mythical scene which may be Paul’s own invention, derived from a perceived personal revelation. The Gospel versions would probably ultimately be traced back to him. (We should also note that the establishment of the Eucharist is missing in other places in the rest of the early Christian record where we would expect to find it, such as the eucharistic prayers in the Didache, chapters 9 and 10, and in Hebrews 9:15-22 and even 7:1-3: see Supplementary Article No. 9: A Sacrifice in Heaven.)

But this “sacred meal” and the type of sacramentalism it entails, are not of Jewish derivation. Eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Deity—of any god—would have been a repugnant and blasphemous concept to any observant Jew, making it certain that an historical Jesus could never have established such a rite or foisted it upon his followers (see Maccoby, *Paul and Hellenism*, p. 99). Instead, Paul’s sacramental myth is strongly Greek flavored, and his Lord’s Supper is very close to the sacred meals of the Greek cultic mysteries, down to the word he uses, *deipnon*.

Such a meal signified the union of the initiates with the god of the cult’s worship, and a sharing in his nature and saving act—usually an overcoming of death in some way. We know of myths that were attached to such cultic meals. The Sabazius cult observed a communal supper which symbolized the heavenly banquet of the blessed which the initiates could look forward to after death. The cult of Mithras had an origin myth which explained where its sacred meal had come from. After Mithras had slain the bull (the ‘salvific act’ in Mithraism), he and the sun god Helios sealed a covenant by dining together on loaves of bread—some say on the meat of the bull himself—and drinking from cups which contained water and wine mixed. The goddess Isis was looked upon as having personally established the mystery rites associated with her, and this included a sacred meal. None of these gods and their activities were regarded as based in identifiable history.

As for the ‘narrative’ elements in verse 23 (“on the night of his arrest/betrayal”), there is nothing to prevent mythical stories from being set “at night,” especially ones involving death and sacrifice. And if the Corinthian Supper is observed after sundown (Paul does not specify), the origin myth would likely be placed at a corresponding time. But since so much of early Christian belief comes from scripture, it would not be surprising if this feature were dependent on Paul’s study of the writings. Unfortunately, he does not enlighten us, though 1 Corinthians 5:7 does link Christ’s sacrifice with Passover, whose meal is celebrated after dark.

Translators have a tendency to use the terms “arrested” or “betrayed” (the latter alluding to Judas) in rendering “*paradidomi*” in this part of the verse. This, I would suggest, is governed by Gospel preconceptions. The verb means, in its basic sense, to “hand over” or “deliver up” and is a technical term in the context of justice or martyrdom. In the Gospel story it can take on the meaning of arrest or betrayal (as in Mark 14:21), but in Paul there is no need to see it this way. He uses the same verb in Romans 8:32: “He (God) did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.” Here it can hardly imply betrayal or arrest. In Ephesians 5:2 and 25 it is Christ who “gave himself up on your behalf.” No thought of Judas or of an arrest on Passover eve would be present here.

We might also note that the Greek shows a curious use of tenses. The verb “was handed over” (*paredidoto*) is in the imperfect, which literally makes the meaning “on the night he was being delivered up.” This implies that the act of surrender was going on all through the Supper! It seems that Paul could hardly have had the Gospel scene in mind, and scholars who have noted this (e.g., Robertson and Plummer, *International Critical Commentary, First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.243) suggest that Paul is “taking a broader meaning,” perhaps of surrender by the Father as in the Romans passage. Curious, indeed.

Conclusion

When we allow Paul to speak for himself, rather than impose upon him the narrative world of the evangelists, we find a consistent picture throughout the letters. The governing force in his life’s work, as it is with all the competing apostles who roam the byways of the empire preaching the divine Christ, is the power of God’s Spirit, manifested through revelation and a study of scripture. No historical man who had recently begun the movement hovers in the background of Paul’s thought. His gospel comes from God, and its subject matter is the Christ, the intermediary Son who is the hallmark of the religious philosophy of the age. Everything Paul has to say about his Christ Jesus (including his features “according to the flesh”) comes from scripture, that window onto the higher spiritual world of God and his workings (see Part Two of the Main Articles).

Paul occasionally feels himself in direct contact with his Christ Jesus in heaven, receiving instruction from him, as in that handful of pronouncements which scholars call “words of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 9:14, 11:23, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). And he, like all contemporary Christians, awaits the arrival of this Son and Lord from heaven at the imminent End, when they shall set eyes on his person for the first time. In 1 Corinthians itself, Paul refers three times to the coming, the “revealing” of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7, 11:26, 16:22). In not one of them, nor in any of the other dozen occurrences throughout the Pauline corpus, do we sense any suggestion that this will be a second coming, the return of a figure who had previously walked the earth in Paul’s own lifetime.

Transfigured On The Holy Mountain The Beginnings of Christianity

A Genesis From Heaven

Confronted with the possible non-existence of an historical Jesus, many today find it difficult to conceive of how Christianity could have begun. That difficulty is not a new one. The response to a human man by his followers, who were convinced of his divinity and buoyed by his perceived resurrection, was an idea which began to be adopted by the third and fourth generations of the Christian movement as a means of explaining the origins of their faith. This myth came to be embodied in the Gospels and Acts.

The story, however, is different in the New Testament epistles. These diverse writings were produced during Christianity's first hundred years, in different locations by many different writers, from Paul on his missionary travels, to others in his communities who after his passing wrote in his name, to several anonymous writers who produced little treatises or polemical tracts dealing with local situations and crises within a wide and uncoordinated world of Christian belief. In the second century, as an evolution toward the unification of that world took place, centered upon Rome, these little writings were collected. Where lacking, they were assigned authors, usually drawn from the body of legendary apostles now envisioned as having been followers of an earthly Jesus, such as Peter, John, James and Jude. (A similar process led to the naming of the Gospels.)

In some cases, epistles may have come with such names already attached (they were "pseudonymous"). These names were given either at the time of writing, when no link of the purported author to a human Jesus would yet have been envisioned, or at some intervening time. In some cases, epistolary openings and conclusions were added, to turn them into formal letters, since such a form was considered to be the proper setting in which doctrinal and polemical material should be presented. And universally, the Jesus or Christ spoken of by these diverse and originally anonymous writers was now assumed to be the human man who had recently come to life on the pages of the Gospels. It is perhaps surprising that, given the widespread and blatant practice of revision, interpolation and invention found throughout the Christian documentary record, these writings were not subjected to a degree of reworking which would have incorporated the new assumptions about an historical Jesus and forever eradicated a more accurate picture of Christianity's infancy.

For these epistles are full of references to how the faith arose and how the movement began. Rather than a response to the ministry of a recent man, whom they never identify, or a reaction to historical events surrounding a crucifixion and imagined resurrection, the driving force was seen to be the Spirit of God, sent from heaven through revelation. Paul in Romans 16:25-26 (though this passage may be a later insertion by one of the pseudo-Pauline writers) declares that he has "brought you the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the divine secret kept in silence for long ages but now disclosed, and through prophetic scriptures by the eternal God's command made known to all nations" (New English Bible translation). In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul insists that he has received his gospel from no other human being, but "through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

That gospel, about Christ's death for sin and his rising on the third day, has apparently come to him from scripture (*kata tas graphas*, 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4.) Compare Romans 1:2f, with its gospel from God "about his son," *kata sarka* and *kata pneuma*, which has been "announced

beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures.” The way Paul puts it, God has foretold *Paul’s gospel* about the Son, not Jesus’ own life and actions!

The writer of 1 Peter tells his readers that the things foretold in the prophets related not to those ancient times but to the present. They have now been announced not through any historical Jesus and his ministry, but “through preachers who brought you the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1:12); this Christ they preach “was revealed in this last period of time for your sake” (1:20). 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 3:5, Colossians 1:26 and 2:2, Titus 2:11 and 3:5: such passages speak of the sending of the Spirit by God to apostles and prophets like Paul as the defining mark of the present period. Only now has the existence of the Son and his redeeming work, “the secret of Christ,” been revealed, and salvation made available as the end of the present age nears.

The Launching of a Sect

But there are several epistles which give us an insight into how, within this overall picture of the sending of God’s Spirit and gospel, certain individual communities among those which eventually dotted the early Christian landscape actually formed. We can perceive a kind of “event” lying at the inception of a given sectarian group or apocalyptic circle. Anticipating a communication from God, awaiting inspiration while perusing the sacred writings, many in the fevered atmosphere of the first century imagined that such things had indeed been forthcoming. We will look briefly at two of these, then focus in some detail on a third, one of the most fascinating passages in all the New Testament epistles: the so-called Transfiguration scene in 2 Peter.

First, the Epistle to the Hebrews 2:3-4. The following translation is based on the NEB, but with its more fanciful elements removed:

³What escape can there be for us if we ignore a salvation so great? For this salvation was first announced through the Lord; those who heard confirmed it to us, ⁴with God adding his testimony by signs, by miracles, by various powerful deeds, and by distributing the gifts of the Holy Spirit at his own will. [The NEB in verse 3 reads: “through the lips of the Lord himself,” and “those who heard him confirmed it to us,” neither of which is supported by the Greek.]

Most commentators are anxious to assume that “the Lord” refers to Jesus, and this may be the case, but in what sense? Paul Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, p.139) compares the phrase “through the Lord” with the earlier phrase “through angels” (verse 2), making the point that in both cases it is God doing the announcing, through old and new intermediaries. This in itself waters down the idea everyone wishes to see in this phrase, namely an allusion to the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth. In any case, this is the language of revelation. The idea being expressed is parallel to the main idea stated at the beginning of the epistle, that “in this final age (God) has spoken to us in (or through) the Son (*en huio*).” But the voice of the Gospel Jesus is never heard in this epistle; all the Son’s words come from scripture. Thus we are entitled to read these passages according to the overarching philosophy of the period: that God communicates with the world through his emanations, through a spiritual intermediary; in certain sectarian circles of Jewish thought, the “Son” Jesus, the Christ.

The entire passage in Hebrews 1:1-14 reveals an era in which scripture was being newly read and interpreted to find references to—and the voice of—the Son, a spiritual entity who for this writer is “superior to the angels” (1:4). As “the heir of all things, through whom (God) made the universe,” as “the effulgence of God’s splendor and the stamp of his very being, who sustains the

universe by his word of power” (1:2-3), the Son is an expression of the wider philosophical concept—primarily Platonic—of an intermediary force who reveals and provides access to God, an agent in the divine scheme of salvation. (See Part Two of the Main Articles.)

The announcement of salvation referred to in 2:3-4, was delivered through God’s Son on a purely spiritual level, derived from scripture. Some experience of revelation, a perception of the intermediary ‘voice’ of the Son, came to a group in the past (how long ago is difficult to say, but some time has elapsed). Those who received this revelation had passed on what they “heard” to the writer and his readers. Likely these two parties were within the same community; perhaps they refer to two generations, though this is not clear, nor is the question of when all the theology contained in the epistle was developed.

Verse 4 speaks of God confirming the original revelation by signs and miracles. The ambiguity of the Greek makes it uncertain whether such signs came at the time of revelation, the time of its passing on (if the two are distinct), or as a reinforcement of the message as the years went by. But those who wish to see verse 3 as a reference to Jesus’ ministry are left wondering why such signs from God would be appealed to as validating the message of salvation, while the writer ignores Jesus’ own miracles which according to the Gospels served this very purpose. As well, we could point out that Hebrews 5:12 also refers to the teaching received at the time of the movement’s inception, but rather than this being Jesus’ own teachings, such things are referred to as “God’s oracles,” a phrase which clearly points to revelation. Nor do the “rudiments” of faith and ritual which are listed immediately afterward (6:12) say anything of an historical ministry.

The concluding phrase of 2:4, “by distributing the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” reinforces the idea inherent in the whole passage. This is a time and a process of salvation impelled by the activity of God’s Spirit, not by the recent work of the Son on earth speaking and acting in his own person. Whether through visionary experiences or simply an inspired study of scripture, God is perceived as making his salvation known, and confirming it by certain wonderful happenings. The conviction of such revelation was the inaugurating event of this sect—or at least of its present beliefs and activities.

The Promise of Eternal Life

The so-called Prologue to the first epistle of John points to a similar experience by the Johannine community at its inception. Here is the NEB’s version of verses 1 and 2:

¹It was there from the beginning; we have heard it, we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life. ²This life was made visible [manifested, phaneroo]; we have seen it and bear our testimony; we here declare to you the eternal life which dwelt with [literally, was with] the Father and was made visible to us. . . .

Here we have the description of an event of revelation, or perhaps a longer process symbolized as a single event, a moment when certain people believed they were receiving evidence of the offering of eternal life. These verses speak of that event, that life, in poetic terms, of seeing it, hearing it, touching it. Despite attempts by most commentators to make this passage a reference to Jesus’ ministry, the pronouns are neuter, the tone is impersonal, the language that of revelation.

As the Prologue now stands, the offering of eternal life (in verse 3, not quoted above) is said to be shared “with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.” But there is some question as to whether

any reference to the Son stood in the initial version of this passage. The key verse 2 talks of the eternal life as dwelling in the Father (we cannot presume to read this phrase according to later Johannine understanding) with no mention of the Son, and other parts too of this multi-layered epistle focus entirely on God. It is possible that the sect began with a characteristic Jewish focus on God alone, though with a type of doctrine and outlook reminiscent of groups like the Essenes. (See Supplementary Article No. 2: A Solution to the First Epistle of John, for a fuller discussion of the Prologue and these matters.)

The entire tenor of 1 John points to a belief in God's actions through the Spirit, and through a Son who is a spiritual intermediary, not a recent historical figure. When the idea is broached in chapter 4 that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," an idea which is denied by other Christians whom the writer condemns, the confirmation of such a doctrine is the proper Spirit sent from God, not apostolic witness or traditions going back to an historical Jesus or remembered historical events. The Johannine community is one which, like the community that produced Hebrews, owes its formation to perceived revelation from God. At a post-epistle stage, some segment of this community came in contact with the Synoptic story of Jesus of Nazareth and incorporated it into its beliefs in a spiritual Revealer Son, producing the Fourth Gospel. (See the final section of Supplementary Article No. 2.)

Spotlight on Jerusalem

Neither the Johannine community nor the one producing Hebrews are clearly locatable in time and place. We know of no names associated with either of these sects at the time these documents were written, with the minor exception of three local people who are mentioned in the little third epistle of John. (The apostle John, of course, is no longer considered the writer of these epistles, or of the Fourth Gospel.) Hebrews' reference to Timothy toward the end of that epistle (13:22) is not regarded by all scholars as authentic.

But what about the group concerning which we do know names and places, the one that later came to be looked upon as the fount of the whole Christian movement: the circle in Jerusalem around Peter and James at the time of Paul? Paul's references to this group of "brothers" which numbered over 500 and were engaged in some kind of apostolic work (1 Corinthians 15:6-7 and 9:5) show that it was probably a well-known and established body in Jerusalem itself. They seem to have been referred to as "brothers of (or in) the Lord" (see 1 Corinthians 9:5, Philippians 1:14), while James himself, apparently the head of the order, seems to have been known as *the* "brother of the Lord" (Galatians 1:19, if this is not a later marginal gloss to differentiate him from the Gospel James, son of Zebedee).

We do not know when this sect formed, or for what reason. We do not know whether "the Lord" might originally have referred to God himself. What we do know, if 1 Corinthians is to be relied upon, is that members of this group underwent experiences of the Christ. These experiences have for almost two millennia been regarded as appearances of a resurrected human Jesus to his former followers. However, many critical scholars (such as the Jesus Seminar) have come to the conclusion that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 is describing a set of visionary experiences only, convictions on the part of certain people, including himself, that they had been in contact with Christ in his spiritual, exalted state. But with the possible exception of Paul's own vision (though I regard Paul's in the same way as well), these were not 'conversion' experiences, since the group was already formed. They did not launch the sect.

And yet these appearances to Peter, James and the others may have played a role of their own in the genesis of the Christian movement. To arrive at what this was, we will look at a different sort of account found in another epistle, 2 Peter.

A Second Century Silence

Scholars date 2 Peter anywhere between 80 and 125 (occasionally even later), but most (e.g., Koester, Mack, Kelly, Sidebottom) lean to a date one or two decades into the second century. The letter cannot be too early, for the author has lifted out passages from the epistle of Jude and worked them into his own piece, and Jude is definitely the earlier writing. Nevertheless, 2 Peter still speaks of Christ as an entity to “have knowledge of” (1:3, 1:8, 2:20, 3:18), implying revelation rather than historical memory, and there are notable silences which indicate that the writer has no concept of an historical Jesus and is unfamiliar with the Gospel story.

Among these silences is 1:20, where the writer says that “no one can interpret a prophecy of scripture by himself.” Yet Jesus is represented in the Gospels as showing how to do this. Another is 2:1, a warning that “you will have false teachers among you,” which fails to include any mention that Jesus himself had prophesied this very thing. A glaring omission is found in 3:10: “But the Day of the Lord will come, like a thief.” Matthew and Luke (from Q) both have Jesus using the identical image, but the epistle writer gives us no hint of this. J. N. D. Kelly (*Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.368) states: “Christ had Himself likened the coming of the Son of Man to the surprise break-in of a thief, and the vigorous image soon fixed itself on the primitive catechesis.” Yet something seems missing in this “vigorous” transfer to early Christian tradition, for neither 2 Peter, nor Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, can bring themselves to mention that Jesus had been the source of such an image; both also seem ignorant of the term Son of Man. (Revelation, in its two allusions to the thief image—3:3 and 16:15—does not assign it to an earthly Jesus in his ministry.)

A very telling silence appears in 3:2:

Remember the predictions made by God’s own prophets, and the commands given by the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Here the writer seems to lack a sense of Jesus having recently been on earth, issuing predictions and commands in his own physical person. Instead of saying that the Lord had spoken these commands during his ministry, and the apostles had passed them on, the writer is somewhat ambiguous, suggesting that the apostles served as mouthpieces for commands received through revelation or simply through personal judgment of what the Lord wanted. In fact, the parallel between the two phrases in the above verse, the former speaking of God making known his predictions through his prophets, and the Lord and Savior through his apostles, suggests that both God and Savior are using revelatory channels.

Finally, we might note that 2 Peter is a polemical document, primarily concerned with countering accusations and contrary opinions from certain scoffers and errorists (e.g., 1:16, 3:3-4). Apparently these “brute beasts” are concerned solely with the Lord’s power in the present and future, and nothing of his incarnated past, for the author of this epistle never addresses any point of dispute concerning Christ’s life and teachings. No word or incident from the preserved memories about Jesus of Nazareth is offered to counter their objections, no miracle witnessed by many to answer the accusation that the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is based merely “on tales artfully spun” (1:16). And it is certainly a curiosity that nowhere does this author, who writes in Peter’s name, play his best trump card by appealing to the fact that he (Peter) had been a follower of Jesus in his earthly ministry and his chief apostle. (Helmut Koester, in his *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, p.295, refers to 1:14 as “the tradition that Jesus had predicted Peter’s martyrdom.” But the verb here is not one of speaking, it is *deloo*, to reveal, make clear, which places it without much doubt in the realm of revelation.)

Transfigured on the Holy Mountain

But there is a key passage in this epistle which clearly demonstrates the writer's unfamiliarity with both the Gospel story and the figure of an historical Jesus. Here is 1:16-19 in full, courtesy of the NEB:

(16) It was not on tales artfully spun that we relied when we told (gnoridzo) you of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming (parousia); we saw him with our own eyes (literally, we became eyewitnesses) in majesty, (17) when at the hands of God the Father he was invested with honor and glory, and there came to him from the sublime Presence a voice which said: 'This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favor rests.' (18) This voice from heaven we ourselves heard; when it came we were with him on the sacred mountain.

(19) All this only confirms for us the message of the prophets, to which you will do well to attend, because it is like a lamp shining in a murky place, until the day breaks and the morning star rises to illuminate your minds.

Commentators have traditionally seen this as a reminiscence of the Transfiguration scene as recorded in the Synoptics: Mark 9:2-8, Matthew 17:1-8, Luke 9:28-36. But this claim can easily be discredited.

The writer represents himself as Peter, one of three apostles who, according to the account first set down in Mark, witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on a "high mountain" in Galilee. Mark speaks only of his clothes becoming bright, while Matthew and Luke have added a brightness to his face. (The incident does not appear in John, despite the fact that "John" is one of the three Apostles who witnessed it.) During the Gospel event Elijah and Moses appear, and a voice out of the clouds says: "This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him."

Now, in 2 Peter, any idea that this scene had taken place during Jesus' earthly ministry has to be read into things. The writer supplies us with no such context. Moreover, no mention is made of the presence of Moses and Elijah, or of Peter's suggestion that three tabernacles be set up, or that the voice came out of the clouds, features found in all three Synoptic versions. Nor is any mention made of Jesus' clothes or face being illuminated, features which might better identify the figure in the writer's mind as a human one. All this makes it highly unlikely that he has drawn his knowledge of this "incident" from a Gospel account.

Why is the writer presenting his readers with what is clearly a revelatory event? The reason has to do with the Parousia, mentioned in verse 16: ". . . we told you of the power and Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The word "Parousia" is used in the New Testament to refer to the future arrival of Jesus at the End-time. Here in 2 Peter translators almost always render it "his coming," making it a reference to that future event. This would seem to be borne out by a repeat of the word in 3:4, where it clearly entails a future expectation: "Where now is the promise of his coming?" (In 1:16 it could conceivably be limited to the sense of "presence," a reference only to the manifestation of Christ during the incident being described, but let's set that possibility aside and go with the more likely interpretation, and the consensus opinion.)

Here, then, the author is presenting this scene as support for his contention that readers can rely on the Lord Jesus Christ as a powerful entity, that he is present among them, and that the promise will be fulfilled of "full and free admission into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ” (1:11), when that Lord arrives at the Parousia. The writer holds up this incident, however he sees it, as a prophetic vision of what is to come.

The first question which should occur to us—and some scholars have asked it—is this: if the writer is seeking to offer something as “proof” of the power of Christ, something which supports the promise of eternal life for believers, why would he choose an incident from Jesus’ ministry in which his clothes (and possibly his face) were made bright? Even the voice from heaven hardly tells us very much or makes this the most overwhelming of experiences. Why not offer something far more dramatic, something which Peter himself had supposedly witnessed: Jesus’ very resurrection from death? After all, this historical act is the presumed basis for Christian faith in human resurrection. The author could even have supplemented this miracle by enumerating the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his apostles. And if his readers are looking for guarantees of Jesus’ future coming, why not add Jesus’ own promises that he would return? Kelly (*op.cit.*, p.320) acknowledges that “there are fascinating puzzles here which remain unsolved.” Indeed.

Another question: Is all this the language of eyewitness of earthly events? The verb “*gnoridzo*” (make known—“told”—in verse 16) is a technical term in the New Testament for imparting a divine mystery. “*Epoptai*” (eyewitnesses) is also used of the higher grade initiates in the Greek mystery cults who had experienced theophanies (the perceived presence of the god). Rather than visual eyewitness, the idea definitely carries a visionary connotation, suggesting, as Kelly puts it (*op.cit.*, p.318), “privileged admission to a divine revelation.”

Thus, indications are that the writer is recounting a visionary experience attributed to the apostle Peter. He knows of a tradition which says that Peter, while with other apostles (here unspecified), had seen the spiritual Christ. Note that there is no mention here of any *change* to Jesus; we do not have a human figure taking on the appearance of a heavenly one, as in the Gospel scene. Verse 16 simply says: “we saw him in his majesty.” This witness was accompanied by the hearing of a heavenly voice, which further bestowed “honor and glory” upon that majesty. (The NEB is misleading when it separates the “honor and glory” from the voice, implying the Gospel idea of the human figure being transformed. Rather, the Greek states that it was God’s words which constituted and conveyed the honor and glory. Most translations view it this way, or take it ambiguously; the sentence is grammatically awkward, lacking a main verb.)

Verse 18 might seem to suggest the presence of a human Jesus in this scene, but even here the ambiguity tends not to support such an idea. Literally, the Greek says: “This voice we heard borne out of heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain.” The “being with him” is unlikely to refer to the Gospel context of the apostles going up to the mountain with Jesus, because in that case, it is the whole transfiguration event that would have taken place “while we were with him,” including verse 16’s appearance in majesty. Instead, the writer restricts himself to the voice from heaven, suggesting that he simply means that this particular manifestation (the voice itself) occurred ‘while they were experiencing his revelatory appearance.’

Notice the high scriptural content of this incident. E. M. Sidebottom (*James, Jude and 2 Peter*, p.109) points out that the overall atmosphere is similar to Old Testament theophanies of God, as though the scene is modeled on scriptural precedents. The voice from heaven is based on the well-known verse of Psalm 2:7 which crops up in the Gospel scene of Jesus’ baptism as well as of the Transfiguration. (2 Peter’s wording, however, is unlike the Synoptics’ own adaptations, a further indication that the passage is not derived from them.) The “honor and glory” spoken of in verse 17 echoes the words of Psalm 8:5. And the mountain? 2 Peter uses “on the holy mountain,”

which is very close to Psalm 2:6: “on Zion his holy mountain.” This the Synoptics have watered down to “a high mountain.”

Kelly, however, has decided (*op.cit.*, p.319) that the Gospels’ “high mountain” evolved into “holy mountain” over the course of time, assuming the Gospel tradition to be earlier. But 2 Peter’s words are almost certainly there because they appear in the Psalm, and Mark may have been forced to eliminate the “holy” because there was no mountain that could be called such in Galilee where he set this story.

I suspect that the tradition about a visionary appearance by the spiritual Christ to Peter has been ‘elucidated’ with the help of biblical references. We’ll consider what that tradition may have been in a moment.

Lamps in the Darkness

That this passage is not a reminiscence of some event which happened during the ministry of an historical Jesus is clinched by what follows. Verse 19 presents us with a bizarre conclusion which the writer draws from this scene. Let’s repeat the verse here:

All this only confirms for us the message of the prophets, to which you will do well to attend, because it is like a lamp shining in a murky place, until the day breaks and the morning star rises to illuminate your minds.

What is the writer saying? Are we to believe that the eyewitnessed glorification of Jesus of Nazareth into his divine persona, the very voice of God out of heaven acknowledging him as his Son, serves merely to support scripture? That the entire ministry of the Son of God on earth is secondary to Old Testament prophecy? (Kelly calls this “paradoxical”.)

The *Translator’s New Testament* renders the opening of verse 19 this way: “So we believe all the more firmly in the word of the prophets.” In other words, the writer of 2 Peter is presenting this scene as corroboration for the primary source of information about Jesus and the hope of his coming: the Hebrew bible. It is simply inconceivable that he would have so characterized the Transfiguration as presented by the Gospels. Indeed, it is inconceivable that he could have possessed *any* concept of a recent earthly life of Jesus, with all its teachings, prophecies, promises, miracles and the conquest of death itself, yet still focus on the biblical writings as the “lamp shining in a murky place until the day breaks.” This would make scripture the primary testimony, the primary basis, on which Christian hopes for the future rested.

Kelly, in his strained attempt to explain the anomaly of verse 19, passes over this astounding focus on scripture rather than on Christ’s recent life as the lamp for Christians waiting in the dark for salvation. So does A. C. R. Leaney (*The Letters of Peter and Jude*, p.114), who notes instead that, “curiously enough,” verse 19 really says that scriptural testimony to Jesus is “more certain” than the voice of God at the Transfiguration—but only because the prophets spent more words on it and thus made it clearer!

If, on the other hand, the scene the writer is recounting is a tradition about Peter’s vision of a Christ who has not yet arrived on earth, then the weight he gives to this experience is exactly right. Interpretation of the word of God in the sacred writings has been given support by a report about another form of communication from heaven: a vision of the glory of the Son and the voice of God himself identifying and acknowledging him. This vision is taken as a promise of his coming, supporting a promise made in scripture.

It is ironic that the writer began his scene with this disclaimer: these are not “fables” or “tales artfully spun” which he offers, implying that his opponents have labeled them this way. If the writer faced such accusations, surely the most natural rebuttal would have been a spirited presentation of the things Jesus had said and done during his ministry on earth. Instead, he manages to avoid any clear reference at all to an historical Jesus of Nazareth. Kelly, ever resourceful at discerning light where none shines, declares nevertheless (p.316) that “Peter,” in rebutting accusations that his claims are contrived mythology, has given his opponents “the apostolic version of Christianity, with its secure basis in history.”

Evolving Interpretations

2 Peter clearly regards the appearance of Christ in his glory as a forecast of the Parousia. And Kelly allows (p.317) that there is some evidence in early Christian thought that the Transfiguration was an anticipation of the Second Coming. But this is not how the Gospels themselves view it. Instead, Mark 9:9 shows Jesus linking it with his coming resurrection, when he would rise in glory. (The fact that the apostles fail to understand Jesus’ reference to his rising from the dead shows that the evangelist is ‘editorializing’ and that for him the important link *is* with the resurrection.)

If 2 Peter points to an earlier stratum (it would have to be earlier, since the interpretation found in the Gospels and the force of their resurrection story would hardly be lost sight of or abandoned), it is almost a necessary conclusion that this earlier line of thought was not only unfamiliar with the Gospels, but that it knew of no resurrection intervening between the “transfiguration” episode recounted in 2 Peter and the future Parousia. That resurrection, of a human Jesus in historical time, came only with the Gospels, when the tradition about an event witnessed by Peter and others was reinterpreted to point to Jesus’ glorification at the time of his rising from the tomb. (It does not matter that 2 Peter was almost certainly written after the Gospel of Mark. The latter was not yet known to the author of the epistle, who was drawing on older traditions; and this would support the contention that the Gospels were not widely disseminated for some time after they were written.)

Possibly Mark himself conscripted the ‘transfiguration’ tradition into his story and placed it in Jesus’ ministry, where it served to provide a foretaste of Jesus’ resurrection. We must remember that Mark had no post-resurrection appearances to draw on—and unlike his redactors did not invent any—so this scene would have served him as a prophetic substitute (though he was likely writing symbolic midrash, not perceived history). Its old significance as a forecast of the Parousia was abandoned.

Roots of the Christian Movement

All of this opens up some fascinating possibilities. Does the tradition recounted in 2 Peter go back to an actual experience of the apostle Peter who is known to us from the letters of Paul? It is impossible to be sure, but there is no reason why this could not be the case, even if that tradition was subsequently conflated with ‘elucidating’ scriptural material. And if such a tradition shows no knowledge or trace of a resurrection event, we are left with this picture of the early Christian movement in Jerusalem: not a community which reacted to the perceived rising of an earthly Jesus they had known and followed, but one which had come to believe in the imminent arrival of the spiritual Christ at the End time, prompted by a vision (or more likely a series of them) of the sort which later gave rise to the episode recounted in 2 Peter.

The next question is obvious. Do we in fact have an earlier record of that very vision or series of visions of the spiritual Christ? Is it to be found in Paul’s list in 1 Corinthians 15 of those various

individuals and groups, including Peter, who “saw” the Christ, in the sense of receiving a revelation of him, an experience of his presence—which many of today’s critical scholars now agree is Paul’s meaning? If so, our analysis of the 2 Peter episode will support that agreement and point to the greater significance of those experiences in Jerusalem.

For we may well postulate that, for this sectarian group, it was these visions of the divine Christ which resulted in the conviction that he was soon to arrive in glory to establish the Kingdom. It may even be that these visions were the “event” which gave rise to the charismatic missionary movement proceeding out of Jerusalem to preach the Christ and his imminent coming, one which the hostile Saul soon joined as Paul. Thus Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 may be regarded as pointing to the inauguration of the “Petrine-Pauline” branch of the Christian faith, at least in its active phase.

Accordingly, we can place these verses in a kind of parallel to the passages we looked at earlier, in Hebrews and 1 John, as a record of events which gave rise to a new sectarian group or activity within the widespread salvation movement which eventually became known as Christianity. The episode which survives in 2 Peter 1:16-18, no doubt “glorified” in the interim (there is no necessity to think that Peter had his vision on a holy mountain, or heard the voice of God from heaven speaking a verse from the Psalm), gives us a window onto that momentous happening, adding some legendary light to Paul’s bare recital.

In all of the passages we have looked at, tantalizing questions remain. Under what circumstances did these revelatory occurrences take place, and were they responsible for the actual formation of the sectarian group? Or, when one thinks about it, must some form of organization have existed already, possibly of recent vintage, within whose volatile and expectant atmosphere the awaited manifestation from God or Lord inevitably took place? Paul’s gospel “*kata tas graphas*” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) suggests the presence and impact of scriptural study among such groups (as does the entire tenor of the Epistle to the Hebrews), and such intense perusal of the sacred writings may well have triggered the perceived “revelations” all these epistles speak of.

What might have been the content of those revelations? Were they simply a confirmation that the spiritual Christ did indeed exist? Or did they include certain information about his nature and redeeming activities? Paul, as well as those who came after him, spoke regularly about the revelation of the mystery of God, the secret of Christ disclosed in the present time. It may be that ideas about such things as Paul includes in his gospel had been derived from a study of scripture and were then seen to be given confirmation by visions like those enjoyed by Peter and company.

Such study may have been the reason for the formation of the group to begin with. Was this the founding purpose of the “brothers in the Lord” under James, sometime around the quarter mark of the first century in Jerusalem? Were they engaged in any proselytizing activity at the time of those visions, or was such activity largely the result of them? Perhaps the revelation was restricted to the fact that Christ was about to come and inaugurate the Kingdom, prompting an apostolic movement of which Paul became a part.

We have no idea how long the Jerusalem group had been operating. Had it formed specifically to explore contemporary religious ideas about an expected Messiah? Or was it an exploration of the new divine Son: what he had done in his spiritual past and what he would do in the future? Perhaps the latter ideas were a product of the group’s study, no doubt influenced by developing trends of thought in the world around them. Perhaps it had begun as a more mainstream group—with the “Lord” referring not to Christ but to God—only to find itself swept up in the burgeoning new currents of the day. How sectarian was it, and did it have strong apocalyptic expectations

from the start? Or did these arise in earnest only following those experiences of the spiritual Messiah and the promise of his coming?

We are almost totally in the dark about the group's specific beliefs and practices, except for what little emerges in Paul, and that mostly by inference. Acts purports to tell us much, but this document is a second century concoction, entirely at the service of the new myth of an historical Jesus and a unified origin for the Christian movement. While certain elements in Acts have a primitive character which may point to traditions reaching back to early times, no actual sources have been uncovered for anything it presents, and everything would have been recast to fit the new plot line of Christian history.

For a key question remains: how much of what Paul was preaching goes back to the Jerusalem group and how much was a product of his own post-conversion development? Certainly Paul claims no derivation whatsoever from others, even though he acknowledges that they hold common elements (as in 1 Corinthians 15:11). But we must keep in mind that almost everything Paul tells us, or implies, about the group around Peter and James relates to the period when he began to write letters, that is, to the time of the so-called Apostolic Conference around the year 49. It is virtually impossible to tell if the doctrines which the group in Jerusalem believed at that time went back to the period of the initial visions and the sect's formation, perhaps some two decades earlier. Interim developments, among them perhaps Paul's own innovations, may have contributed to an evolution in whatever view of the divine Son of God Peter and the others held.

All these questions will never have firm answers. We are in the area of speculation. But we can add one more point here. Did the visions which ended up in scenes like that of 2 Peter have a direct influence on the creation of Jesus of Nazareth?

By the late first century, many factors were converging to initiate the evolution of the spiritual Christ into an historical Jesus, and some of these tendencies may have been independent of the Gospels. If we can impute to the evangelists any sense that the figure they were portraying had any basis in history (which the evolution of Q might suggest), a major factor which led to placing him in the time of Herod and Pontius Pilate may have been these visions. While it might have seemed natural to place Jesus in the generation of the earliest known apostles, the tradition that Peter, James and others had "seen" him in his exalted state could have contributed to the idea that such apostles had in fact been disciples of an earthly Jesus, and that they had witnessed a transfiguration of the human man; later, such visions became appearances he had made to them after his resurrection.

Paul himself had spoken of seeing the "risen Christ." What was lost sight of was the fact that Paul had not meant the recently risen Jesus of Nazareth, but a divine Christ who in the mythical realm had been killed (at the hands of supernatural powers: 1 Corinthians 2:8; see Supplementary Article No. 3, Who Crucified Jesus?), raised and exalted by God, all of this being the great mystery which God, through scripture and the Spirit, had revealed to those earliest apostles.

Is two to three generations enough lapse of time to allow for such a monumental misunderstanding of the past to take place? In an era of war and upheaval during which much of Palestine was laid waste, in a society which (compared to our own) possessed primitive communication, record-keeping, scientific enlightenment and skills of critical thinking, in an atmosphere of religious fanaticism fuelled by fevered sectarian expectations of mythic proportion, that question scarcely needs to be asked.

Christ As “Man” Does Paul Speak Of Jesus As An Historical Person?

-- I --

While scholars are the first to admit that Paul is woefully silent on just about everything the Gospels tell us about Jesus of Nazareth, they are quick to point to a handful of passages in his letters which seem to indicate that he has an historical figure in mind. For all the talk in the New Testament epistles of Christ Jesus as a transcendent deity, of scripture and the Spirit as the channel of knowledge about him, or the constant reference to God as the source of Christian ethics and the Christian gospel, most scholars continue to fall back on a limited number of phrases about Christ's nature as “man,” his “flesh” and “blood,” words implying birth, or his “coming into the world.” Such things they take as proof that all these writers, even if seemingly indifferent to the Gospel story, nevertheless know that the human man existed and had recently walked the earth.

But do they? Is there another way of reading such passages? If the Christ of the epistles is in other respects a revealed entity, a mystery or “secret” newly disclosed by God who seems to operate in an entirely spiritual dimension with mythological characteristics, can we look for an interpretation of these “human” sounding features which fits into such a context?

Higher and Lower Worlds

We have to start by realizing that the modern mind has long abandoned those views of the universe which for the ancients governed their beliefs in gods and salvation. The concepts of the first century CE have little resonance with the scientific knowledge of the 20th and 21st centuries. When the eye of the ancient philosopher or even the average layperson looked skyward, it imagined it could see a populated spirit world where the bulk of the workings of the universe took place. Near the bottom of this multi-level system lay humanity's sphere of material existence; only Sheol or Hades, the underworld, was lower. Various supernatural layers (usually seven) extended upwards, filled with spiritual life forms, reaching to the highest heaven of pure spirit where the ultimate God dwelled in timeless perfection. Most important, the nature of this reality involved far-reaching correspondences between the higher and lower realms, between spirit and matter.

Even before Plato, near eastern mythology envisioned primal or archetypal forms existing in heaven, of which earthly things were counterparts. But it was Plato who inserted into the intellectual consciousness of the ancient world the concept that the upper realm of spirit contained the primary manifestations of things, in perfect and eternal forms, and that the lower material world contained only transient, imperfect copies of them. Platonism eventually envisioned a ‘chain of generation’ from the mind of God, through emanative spirit prototypes and models, down to earthly end-products in matter.

These concepts became expanded in various ways, showing a range of expression in Greek philosophy as well as in Jewish and other near-eastern thought. A sacred site such as the Jerusalem Temple, for example (as in Hebrews 8 and 9, Wisdom of Solomon 9:8, etc.), was the earthly counterpart of a greater, more perfect heavenly Temple. (Even the Babylonians had held such an idea.) Nations, rulers, groups on earth possessed a corresponding angelic or divine being who represented them, a superior counterpart in heaven, a champion. Evil nations possessed evil angels. This counterpart embodied the qualities which they claimed for themselves, or looked

forward to achieving when the time of salvation arrived (such as in the Similitudes of Enoch: see below.) Events expected to take place on earth had already been worked out in some fashion in archetypal processes in the heavenly realm, or in the mind of God; figures to be revealed in the future already existed and were preparing themselves in heaven. And so on.

Paul and the earliest Christians thus lived at a time when the world of matter was viewed as only one dimension of reality, the observable half of a larger, integrated whole, whose other—invisible—half was regarded as the “genuine” reality, accessible to the intellect. It was characteristic of mythological thinking that the heavenly counterpart was more real and permanent than the earthly one, and prior to it in order of being. (See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p.150.) Such an outlook must be taken into account in all interpretations of the earliest Christian writings. (Note that some of the ideas dealt with here have been presented in previous articles, notably in Part Two of the Main Articles and in Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?)

The World of Myth

When a culture lives with the dominant sense that the world it inhabits is an outpost or antechamber of a more important world, a visible dimension beside or below a vast invisible dimension, it must create a relationship as well as links between the two. Myth is really just a pictorial presentation of the things going on in the unseen dimension and how they interact with the one humans live in.

Discussing myth in the ancient world is hampered by the fact that there was no uniform way of regarding it, since this was a multi-cultural milieu and many ancient streams fed into its collective thinking. To complicate the picture, we have philosophical schools applying themselves to theories about the workings of the spiritual universe, and this influenced the way religious movements formulated their sacred stories. Christianity’s myths were shaped by the whole range of mythological thinking of the era, some of it with roots going back into prehistoric times. We cannot expect to find a uniformity, or even a consistency, in many of its ideas.

Myths represent the other end of the channel flowing between the spiritual world and the human one, by which the latter is sustained and vitalized, given meaning and purpose. Before Platonism, myths were generally set in a dim, distant past. This was the approach (and largely still is) of all pre-scientific societies around the world. And although by the period of early Christianity mythical thinking tended to be recast along more Platonic lines, this long tradition of primordial myth continued to flow as an undercurrent.

Anthropologists of religion like Mircea Eliade (see Bibliography at end) call this distant time of myth the “sacred past.” This was a primordial time at the beginning of things when supernatural beings created the world and first performed acts and established institutions which set the patterns of behavior and belief that present society follows. Primordial time has set the paradigm, the model; present society embodies its copy, its repetition. Human beings have always needed to justify their beliefs and practices, even their sufferings, to invest them with greater-than-human significance, by anchoring them in some divine precedent, in a time and setting which bestows on them a venerable authority. On a personal level, we have here the fundamental appeal of religion: through myth the individual is invested with significance; he or she is rendered sacred by acknowledging a divine, primordial ancestry and entering into a new state of being—a rebirth into union with the supernatural paradigm.

A suitable past, therefore, has to be created. And so do links with that past. This is the purpose of rituals and sacraments, the essential companion pieces to myth. By performing a rite which “re-

creates” the primordial event, society keeps it alive, makes it recur for itself. The vitality and benefits which the divine act had originally generated are regenerated in the present, and those participating in the rite can draw on that regenerated power. Primordial time, in the language of the anthropologists, is made into an “eternal now,” always accessible and repeatable. A simple example is the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist. By staging the rite in the celebration of the Mass, the priest draws Christ into the present proceedings, embodied in the priest’s reenactment of Christ’s original act. That act is kept alive, its benefits continually available to the devotees.

Ancient views of myth had, by the first century, been dramatically affected by Platonic philosophy. Even though processes continued to operate in a similar fashion, the time and place of mythical happenings had largely been shifted from the distant primordial past to a higher world of spiritual realities. (Whether the average devotee of the mystery cults adopted the Platonic outlook or still regarded the myths as inhabiting a prehistoric past is impossible to say, as we have no surviving record of the views of the common people in these matters. But all the expressions we do have, indicate a higher-lower world mentality.) Instead of looking back to archaic beginnings, religious ritual could reach into that parallel, upper dimension and find its paradigms, its spiritual forces, right there. In this higher world, the myths of the savior gods and of earliest Christianity had taken place. Here Attis was castrated, here Mithras had slain the bull, here Osiris had been dismembered. For more sophisticated thinkers like Plutarch and the 4th century Sallustius, such mythical stories were not literal, but merely symbolic of timeless spiritual processes which the human mind had difficulty grasping. See, for example, Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris*, chapter 11.

In this upper world, too, Christ had been crucified at the hands of the demon spirits (1 Corinthians 2:8, Ascension of Isaiah 9; see Supplementary Article No. 3). For Paul and his contemporaries, such things as Christ underwent and the available benefits which flowed from them, are God’s secrets. They are the “mysteries” of this higher sphere, taking place “before or beyond time” (the *pro chronon aionion* of 2 Timothy 1:9; see Part Two). Such mysteries have now been revealed by God, through scripture and the Spirit. For the writer of Hebrews, the sacrificial acts of Jesus the High Priest have taken place in a heavenly sanctuary, a higher world of a Platonic type. (The next Supplementary Article will be devoted to the Epistle to the Hebrews, focusing on its Platonic character.)

Note that, unlike most of the pagan cults whose mythical stories about their gods went back to a time when they were envisioned as having taken place on earth in a primordial past, Christianity in its earliest phase (as in the epistles) had no ‘mythology’ about a Christ Jesus that involved similar earthly sounding events. There was little or no Jesus “story,” not even relating to his death and resurrection. The epistle writers give us no ‘biographical’ details pertaining to these acts of salvation. This void illustrates the recent vintage of the Christ cult, when Platonism was the dominant way of perceiving these things, and Christ was regarded as operating in a spiritual realm, not a primordial historical one. The ‘material’ characteristics he is given, such as the ‘likeness’ of flesh and blood, and aspects like a relationship to David, are not only derived from scripture, they fit into the Platonic scheme of things, as we shall see later in this article.

But even within its basic Platonic nature, Christian myth was further qualified and affected by its Jewish heritage. Whatever the primitive Hebrew view of a “sacred past” may have been in its earlier stages, it eventually moved into a more concrete setting. Primordial figures and processes were transferred to an archaic history, embodied in legends of human patriarchs who had enjoyed special contacts with the Deity. All of it became firmly anchored in an historical past which could be chronicled year by year. Neither Abraham nor Moses—who may or may not (though probably not) be based on actual historical figures—were located in a true sacred past or higher reality. The promises God made to them, the precedents they set, such as the practice of

circumcision, were pinpointed in historical time. This heritage fed into Christian myth and qualified the type of thinking Christianity had taken from the conceptual world of the Greeks.

Thus where the Greek myths were essentially timeless, unrelated to a chronicled past, Paul's myth of Christ had to be 'located' to some extent in an historical sequence. It had features which were derived from scripture, a scripture which presented an ongoing system of salvation history. The redemptive actions of the mythical Christ in the spiritual world had to be 'fitted into' this ongoing pattern. For example, Christ had to be "of David's stock" (Romans 1:3), for the spiritual Christ was now equated with the Messiah, and the clear testimony in scripture that the Messiah would be a descendant of David could neither be ignored nor abandoned. He thus, in some way, was viewed as possessing a Davidic nature. (This also fitted the Platonic view of higher-lower world counterparts, all things in the lower world of humans having a more primary equivalent in the upper world.) As an expression of a new covenant, Christ had also operated under the old law with the purpose of abrogating it. The 'historicity' and human characteristics of scripture rubbed off on the picture of Christ presented by early Christian writers, such as declaring him "born of woman" in Galatians 4:4, under the influence of Isaiah 7:14. (All this made the evolution of the spiritual Christ into an historical figure much easier.) In a moment we will examine in greater detail these and similar key passages in the epistles.

Rites, Sacraments and Paradigms

Just as today we perceive natural laws and forces working in nature and the universe, the ancients perceived spiritual forces operating between the natural world and the supernatural, between the present, earthly reality and the primordial past or higher divine reality. For Paul, the rite of baptism was a true sacrament, something which drew on invisible spiritual forces operating between past and present, between heaven and earth. Baptism linked the Christian initiates with Christ in the spiritual realm. It made them part of a collective, mystical body: Christ the head, believers the limbs and organs (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:15). It also linked them with Christ's mythical act of death and resurrection, conferring a new birth upon them (as in Romans 6:1-11). Paul calls this effect "dying and rising to Christ." Drawing on the spiritual forces generated by Christ's redemptive act, the believer dies to his or her old life in sin and rises to a new one free of sin; and he or she inherits the promise of future resurrection.

Such sacramental thinking was not derived from Judaism, but from Hellenistic religious thought, as expressed in the mysteries. (See, for example, F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p.57.) In describing the relationship between the upper and lower worlds, scholars (e.g. Collins, *op.cit.*, p.150) speak of a "parallelism of action" between heavenly and earthly counterparts, a "structural homologue" (G. Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, p.121). Actions by divine beings in the spiritual realm have their consequences for those on earth who are joined to them. This idea is the key to understanding the concept of salvation which early Christianity shared with the Greek cults. The absorption of the spiritual power generated by the deity and his acts is accomplished through a pattern of "likeness."

Here is the way Paul puts it in Romans 6:5: "For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (NASB translation)

In other words, the spiritual force set up by the acts of the deity in the primordial past or higher reality impacts on the devotee in the present in a parallel way. Death creates a "death," resurrection creates a "resurrection." Whether in the primordial or higher world setting, the spiritual model sets the pattern for the earthly copies. Christ's act of resurrection guarantees the

resurrection of the convert who undergoes the baptismal rite; the rite is the means of harnessing that available spiritual force and making it flow to the believer.

It all fits into that most fundamental of ancient concepts outlined earlier: that earth was the mirror image of heaven, the product proceeding from the archetype, the visible material counterpart to the genuine spiritual reality above. Heavenly events determined earthly realities. It follows that in such a philosophical system, the determining acts of divine forces which conferred salvation would of necessity be located, not on earth, but in that higher realm. Everything Paul says places him in that sort of thought world.

The Paradigm in Heaven

The concept of a paradigm in heaven who determines the fate of his counterparts on earth can be illustrated by a couple of examples from Jewish apocalyptic. In the 7th chapter of the Book of Daniel, we are introduced in a vision to the “one like a son of man,” a heavenly figure who is brought before the throne of God following the overthrow of the last of earth’s great empires. This figure receives power and dominion from God, an act which signifies (so an angel informs Daniel) that the righteous elect of Israel, the “Saints of the Most High,” shall receive such a sovereignty over the earth. Some scholars regard this “one like a son of man” as an angel, others simply as a poetic image of the saints he represents. Still others suggest he is an actual divine figure who serves as a heavenly representative for the saints on earth. Here the issue need not be resolved. Whatever the writer had in mind, Daniel’s figure can serve as an example of the paradigm who undergoes an experience in heaven which guarantees a corresponding experience on earth by his human counterpart. (Daniel’s “son of man” was by the middle of the first century CE to evolve, in some Jewish and related circles, into a definite divine figure, expected from heaven as an apocalyptic judge. He appears in Jewish apocalyptic documents, but also in the Galilean Kingdom movement represented by Q, proceeding from there into the Gospels.)

In the Similitudes of Enoch (chapters 37 to 71 of 1 Enoch, probably written in the mid first century by a Jewish sect) the figure called the Elect One or Righteous One—also Son of Man and Messiah—is revealed to be waiting in heaven. Soon he shall appear on earth to render judgment, he will raise the oppressed and overthrow the wicked rulers and those who reject the Most High (God). He is the champion of a group on earth, the suffering righteous and elect. In the Elect One dwells those qualities, holiness and righteousness, shared by his earthly counterparts. They await the changes he will bring, including their own glorification and reception of eternal life. This Righteous One (a ‘spiritual Messiah’ idea among Jews!) is not a sacrificial figure, however; the Enochian sect had not evolved in this direction.

But whoever wrote the christological hymn quoted by Paul in his letter to the Philippians (2:6-11) has done just that. Here we have a divine being who “shared in God’s very nature,” who humbled himself and in obedience accepted death. As a consequence, “God raised him to the heights,” where he received the homage of all powers and beings on earth and in heaven. The implication is that this self-sacrificing divinity (who operates in the celestial spheres, not on earth: see Supplementary Article No. 3) is a paradigm for believers on earth, who will similarly be exalted as a consequence of their own obedience and death. As Morna Hooker puts it (see Bibliography): “Christ becomes what we are (likeness of flesh, suffering and death), so enabling us to become what he is (exalted to the heights)”.

We can now go on to consider how writers like Paul describe their paradigmatic Christ and whether such terminology as they use can be fitted into the contemporary picture of a multi-level, homologic universe.

The Gospel About the Son

At the very beginning of the collection of New Testament epistles, in the opening verses of Romans, lies a statement which many declare requires us to go no further. Even if Paul were never to breathe a subsequent word about Jesus of Nazareth, they say, in verse 3 lies something which unmistakably points to the concept of an historical man lying in the background of Paul's thought about the Christ. And yet, the situation is quite the opposite. This illuminating statement has stood at the head of the Pauline corpus for almost two millennia, and should long ago have revealed both the true beginnings of Christianity and the role scripture played in them, as well as the absence of any historical Jesus in Paul's mind. All it needs is the application of common sense to the words Paul has written. Let's see if we can do just that.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised (or, announced) beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who . . .

And he goes on to itemize two elements of that gospel about the Son, which we'll look at in a moment. But first, let's take a sideways glance at another statement in Paul, in Romans 16:25-6 (possibly inserted by a pseudo-Pauline writer), which clearly defines the source of Paul's gospel: ". . . according to the revelation of the mystery kept in silence for long ages but now revealed, and made known through prophetic writings at the command of God . . ." This and several other passages in the Pauline corpus identify scripture and revelation through the Spirit as the source of Paul's (and of those who came after him) information about the Christ, and we can keep this in mind as we look closely at Romans 1:1-4.

Consider what Paul is saying in these verses and ask yourself: Is there something wrong with this picture?

The gospel is God's, received through revelation. Not from other men, not from Jesus himself through channels of apostolic transmission. There seems to be no sign of a role for an historical Jesus here in formulating the gospel.

God had promised this gospel beforehand, or announced it: both are valid translations of the Greek *proepangelo*. (The root of the verb is the same as the word for "angel," God's "announcer" and messenger.) This gospel had been announced in scripture, in the holy writings of the prophets. This is where Paul has gotten his gospel about the Son. It was all there ahead of time, encoded by God into the writings, awaiting Paul's discovery. God in scripture had looked ahead—*not to Jesus, but to the gospel that told of him*.

How could Paul have presented things in this bizarre way? He is telling the Roman Christians that scripture contains the forecast of his own gospel, not the forecast of Jesus and his life. But if God had encoded in scripture information about Jesus that would form part of Paul's gospel, then God would have been first and foremost foretelling Jesus. Any sane mind would have made the simple adjustment and said that God had announced information beforehand *about Jesus*. Not about Paul's gospel.

As Paul presents it, scripture was not the prophecy of Jesus' life and activities. It was the prophecy of the gospel which told of those activities.

This means that no life of Jesus intervened between the writing of scripture and the revelation of the gospel to Paul. Wherever or whenever the activities of the Son had taken place, it had not been located in history between the two events.

This is perfectly consistent with the manner of presentation we can see throughout the New Testament epistles, especially in connection with the revelation of God's "mystery." The secret of Christ has been hidden for long ages, and the first bringing to light of that secret, the first action on God's age-old promises, has taken place not in a life of Jesus in the recent past, but in the inspirations and activities of missionary prophets like Paul.

We are forced to conclude that in Paul's past, there was no historical Jesus. Rather, the activities of the Son about which God's gospel in scripture told, as interpreted by Paul, had taken place in the spiritual realm and were accessible only through revelation.

The Seed of David

But let's go on. In Romans 1:3-4, Paul gives us two items of this gospel about the Son, encoded by God into scripture:

... who arose from the seed of David according to the flesh, and was designated Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness [or, the holy spirit] after his resurrection from the dead.

This part of the sentence is frustratingly cryptic, as reflected by the many different translations of its various elements. (The above translation of verses 1 to 4 are partly my own, in an attempt to lean toward the literal Greek.) Here, Paul offers two elements about the Son. One is *kata sarka*, literally "according to the flesh," a vague and particularly cryptic phrase that is used throughout early Christian literature in a variety of subtle ways, often with unclear meaning. The other is *kata pneuma*, literally "according to the spirit." Whether the latter is a reference to the Holy Spirit is also uncertain. Perhaps Paul is using *kata* to refer to something like "in the sphere of the flesh" and "in the sphere of the spirit," which is a suggestion put forward by the eminent scholar C. K. Barrett. Such a translation is, in fact, quite useful and possibly accurate. But let's look at *kata sarka* first.

... who arose from the seed of David, according to the flesh [or, in the sphere of the flesh] ...

Is this a piece of historical datum? If it is, it's the only one Paul ever gives us, for no other feature of Jesus' human incarnation appears in his letters. But the fact that it is linked with the second element, which is an entirely spiritual event derived from scripture, suggests that it is not a biographical element Paul is offering.

In fact, it follows, grammatically and conceptually, out of what Paul has just said: it is an element of the gospel about God's Son which has been pre-announced in scripture. Paul has told us clearly and unequivocally that this is where he has gotten this piece of information. In verses 1-2, Paul has focused on the message to be found in the sacred writings. Why would he suddenly step outside that focus and stick in a biographical datum about Jesus of Nazareth derived from historical knowledge—then return to scripture (as we shall see) for his second element? In fact, scripture was full of predictions that the Christ, the Messiah, would be descended from David.

Paul, in reading these, would have applied them to his particular version of the Son, the Son who was a spiritual entity, not a human one.

Was it possible for the divine Son who operated entirely in the spiritual realm to be “of David’s stock,” and in a way that was “in the sphere of the flesh”? I will suggest (based on the discussions above and to come) that the answer is yes, and that Christ’s “arising from David” is a characteristic of Christ *in the spirit world*, a mythological element.

Paul here uses the same verb for “arose” (descended, born of) which he also uses in Galatians 4:4 (“born of woman, born under/subject to the law”). When I discuss this latter passage below, I will explore more fully the point that this is not a straightforward verb of “birth” but rather of “becoming,” of “coming into existence.” Its broader implication fits the atmosphere of myth, the workings of the higher world where these processes went on.

A Window in Scripture

But let’s continue with the second element of Paul’s gospel about the Son, derived from scripture:

. . . and was designated Son of God in power, according to the spirit (or, in the sphere of the spirit), by his resurrection out of the dead.

This is obviously an entirely spiritual event, taking place in heaven after Christ’s death and resurrection (which were themselves spiritual events). The epistles, especially the Pauline ones, contain several scenes and glimpses into the spiritual realm, supporting the view that this was as much a part of reality to these writers as any events on the material earth. But where specifically did Paul get the information about this particular heavenly event?

The partial sentence above contains two relevant features: Christ’s designation as Son of God, and the phrase “in power”. Where in the sacred writings could Paul have found an important passage which contained these two elements side by side?

Psalm 2 is a royal coronation hymn. God is represented as welcoming and anointing his king, and the writer warns the foreign nations to beware of their plots and ambitions. In verses 7-8 God declares—and both Jews and Christians took these words as directed to the Christ, the Messiah:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord:

He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you . . .

Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
and the ends of the earth as your possession.

Here, surely, is the source of Paul’s second ‘gospel’ element: Jesus is proclaimed God’s Son by God himself. And he is invested with power, receiving the nations of the earth as his possession. (The original Psalm writer had Israel herself, through its king, in mind, though the sentiment was no doubt rhetorical.) The theme of Jesus as king runs like a thread throughout the entire history of Christian tradition, and it certainly was not based on Jesus’ recorded life experiences.

The two elements, the one in the sphere of the “flesh” (the lowest heavenly sphere, associated with the material world: see below), the other in the sphere of the spirit (the highest level of God, to where Jesus ascended after his death), go hand in hand. They are both parts of God’s gospel about his Son, the Son’s activities in the spiritual realm, found in scripture. Paul is preaching a Jesus entirely derived from the Hebrew bible.

The early Christian movement, as reflected in Paul, was not a movement of slaves and disenfranchised poor. That was a later development which is often read back into the earliest stage. In fact, Paul himself and the circles he moved in were highly intelligent and sophisticated. We can see that in his letters. These people were thoroughly immersed in the religious philosophy of the day, both Jewish and Greek, philosophies which could be highly mystical. It was quite possible for minds like Paul's to regard scripture (that all-important force which governed their lives) as a window onto the higher world of "genuine" reality, where spiritual processes took place which had counterparts and effects in the world below.

This analysis of Romans 1:1-4 has led to the conclusion that it is the sacred writings, the 'window' onto the spiritual realm, which have determined many of the features given to the divine Christ. If scripture said that the Messiah was descended from David, then in some way this had to be so, even if the Christ was now regarded as an entirely spirit-world entity. Because the universe held parallel counterparts, Paul could well envision that in a prototypic way, in the parallelism which existed between the higher and lower parts of the universe, Christ himself could bear a relationship to David. (This will be further supported when we come to examine the concept of Christ as "man".) And since Paul and his contemporaries are constantly speaking of the "mysteries" of God, the "wisdom that is folly," we should not require of them that they understood in any logical or scientific sense exactly how this was so. (To our modern minds, of course, it would simply be gibberish.)

Sprung From Judah

We might cast a comparative glance at Hebrews 7:14, which is another passage that speaks of Christ's 'racial' lineage and which points toward scripture as the source:

For it is very evident (prodelon) that our Lord is sprung (anatetalken) from Judah, a tribe to which Moses made no reference in speaking of priests.

First of all, this statement is made in the midst of a theological argument, not a recounting of historical facts. The whole tenor of Hebrews is one of presenting Christ as a new High Priest, one who supplants the old cultic system which was run by the priestly class of the tribe of Aaron, the Levites. The writer finds Christ's "archetype" in Melchizedek, who was also not a member of the Levites (what tribe he may have been is never stated). The point is, Christ must be of a new line in order to create a new order of priesthood.

And where does the writer find confirmation that the new High Priest is indeed of a different line than the Levites? How does he support this very necessary claim that Christ is "sprung from Judah"? Well, there is not a word spent in appealing to historical facts or apostolic traditions concerning Jesus of Nazareth, no reference to Mary or Joseph, no mention of his lineage as recounted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The word "*prodelon*" means "clear, manifest" to the senses or to judgment (compare 1 Timothy 5:24, 25); it does not mean "a matter of historical record." It fits the sense of "clear to someone who knows the scriptures," which in itself fits the thought world of the entire epistle.

The verb "*anattellein*," to spring (by birth), is also the language of scripture. It is used in several messianic passages, such as Ezekiel 29:21 ("a horn shall spring forth"), and Zechariah 6:12. Hebrews pointedly never says that Jesus is a descendent or "son" of David; the latter is a figure the epistle shows no interest in. The author simply needs scriptural support for the concept of a priest arising from a tribe which has never "had anything to do with" the old cult (7:13), a priest who can establish a new law to supplant the impotent old one, and a new hope (7:18 and 19). And to confirm Jesus' role as High Priest, the writer turns to nothing in history, he draws on no

deed or saying from the story of Jesus' life, but delves instead (7:17) into the timeless pages of scripture: "Thou art a priest forever, in the succession of Melchizedek." This line from the all-important Psalm 110 he takes as God's word to Jesus.

We might also note that "is sprung from" is in the perfect tense in the Greek, not a past-tense aorist, such as we might have expected had the writer meant: "Jesus of Nazareth was sprung from Judah." Instead, he uses the perfect "has sprung" which fits the mythical outlook: such things have happened, but they are also eternal and timeless, just as scripture, the timeless word of God, continues to inform us of these spiritual events. Buchanan, in his Anchor Bible Commentary (*Hebrews*, p.253) admits that "the author may not have received the information from local tradition at all . . . (but) from his use of scripture." Scripture: God's 'window' onto the higher spiritual world and its counterparts to earthly things.

Born of Woman

The second Pauline passage most often appealed to in support of Paul's knowledge of an historical Jesus is Galatians 4:4-5.

. . . God sent his own Son, born of woman, born under the Law (literally, becoming or arising out of woman / the law) to purchase freedom for the subjects of the law, in order that we might attain the status of sons.

This passage, too, with the verses that come after it, does not have to be read as it always has been. It needs a closer examination.

First, let's detach and look at the principal phrase, "God sent his own Son." There is no problem in taking this in the sense of the present-day revelation of the spiritual Christ by God to apostles like Paul. This is borne out by verse 6, which says that "God has sent (exactly the same verb) into our hearts the spirit of his Son. . . ." This is hardly the coming of the historical Jesus of Nazareth into the world, but the arrival of the spiritual Christ in the current phenomenon of divine revelation.

Verse 7 piles the evidence of Paul's meaning even higher: "You are therefore no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's own act an heir." If Paul had had the acts of an historical Jesus in mind when he spoke of freedom and attaining the status of sons (verse 5), why does he now revert to calling such things the result of an act of God? If, however, he has in mind the *revelation* of the Son and his acts in the spiritual realm, the idea of the agency of God becomes fully intelligible. And Paul continues his characteristic focus on God in verses 8 and 9.

Further, in the Greek of verse 5, the subject of the verb "purchase freedom" (literally, redeem) remains God. In other words, Paul has introduced Jesus into the present period, but he has failed to follow through by expressly having him do the redeeming while he is here! Again, if Jesus is only being *revealed* in the present time, God's role remains primary.

Finally, the two qualifying phrases, "born of woman, born under the Law," are descriptive of this Son, but not necessarily tied to the present "sending." The International Critical Commentary (Burton, *Galatians*, p.216f), points out that the way the verb and participle tenses are used in the Greek, the birth and subjection to the law are presented as simple facts, with no necessary temporal relation to the main verb "sent." In other words, the conditions of being "born of woman" and being "made subject to the law" (Burton's preferred meaning) do not have to be seen as things that have occurred in the present. Paul has simply enumerated two of the characteristics of the spiritual Christ which are relevant to the issues under discussion. (There are

those who maintain that these two qualifying phrases may be later redactions, which is always possible.)

Burton also notes that the word usually translated as “born” (*genomenon*) is not the most unambiguous verb to use for this concept; a form of *gennao*, to give birth, would have been more straightforward. Instead, Paul uses a form of *ginomai*, which has a broader meaning of “to become, to come into existence.” “Out of woman,” of course, implies birth, but the point is, the broader concept lends itself better to the atmosphere of myth, if that is what Paul has in mind. And his “born of woman” is not only something that was said of certain mythical savior gods, like Dionysos (and various other products of Zeus’ mythical dallies), it is a detail he could well have based not on history, but on the source he uses for all he says about the Son: the Jewish scriptures. The famous passage in Isaiah 7:14,

A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son and will call him Immanuel. . . was taken by Jew and early Christian alike to refer to the Messiah. Paul links this idea with Jesus being “subject to the law.” The latter was a paradigmatic feature which Christ had to possess, so that he could stand in parallel with those whom Paul is addressing, those who had themselves been “subject to the law”—until Christ abrogated it in this new age of revelation and faith.

Again, as in the Romans 1 passage, if Isaiah referred to the Messiah as “born of woman,” Paul would have concluded that in some way there must have been a spiritual world archetypal process to which this scriptural passage pointed. There would have been little difficulty in accepting this, given the overriding philosophy of the day which saw all things on earth as counterpart copies of primary manifestations in the higher spiritual realm. And as the mythical stories of all savior gods contained human-like features, including “births” from women, such a characteristic of the spiritual Christ would not have seemed out of place.

A glance back to the sentiments of Galatians 3 should confirm that, however Paul saw Christ as “born of woman, born under the law,” he didn’t see him as arriving in the present time through that “birth.” The key verses are 3:23 and 25:

Before this faith came, we were close prisoners in the custody of the law, pending the revelation of faith . . . Now that faith has come, the tutor’s charge is at an end.

Clearly, the present event of salvation history is not the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and death are once again missing from the picture. Rather, it is the arrival of faith in the response to the missionary movement represented by inspired apostles like Paul. Here Paul is consistent with the way he expresses himself in many other places.

As for the intermediate verse 24 (the lacuna in the quote above), the New English Bible translates it as “the law was a kind of tutor in charge of us until Christ should come,” which illustrates the tendency to read Gospel preconceptions into the epistles. But an alternate translation is provided in a footnote: “a kind of tutor to conduct us to Christ.” This reflects the simple Greek words “*eis Christon*” (to Christ). Thus we can easily arrive at the meaning “leading us to faith in Christ” or to his revelation, or to the time of such things.

Earlier, in verse 19, Paul speaks of “the arrival of the ‘seed’ to whom the promise was made.” Since Paul has just defined this “seed” as Christ himself, some claim that this is a clear reference to the arrival of Jesus in the historical sense. But they overlook the fact that such a definition was made in order to link the gentiles to Abraham through Christ, so it is the present-day believing gentile who can be in mind here. Besides, it would be awkward to say that it is to Christ that “the

promise was made.” In any event, the case has already been made that when early Christians speak of Christ “coming,” this can readily be taken in a spiritual sense.

Allegorical Mothers

Paul, of course, never tells us the name of his “woman” nor anything about her. And as a final aside to our look at Galatians we might ask, if Paul is supposed to have Mary in mind in 4:4, why does she not appear in his elaborate allegory in the same chapter? In 4:24-31 Paul makes his own interpretation of the story of Abraham and the two sons he had by his two wives. The first woman is Abraham’s concubine, the slave Hagar: she gives birth to Ishmael, who stands for the Jewish race which still exists in slavery under the Law and the old covenant. That race and that covenant is represented by Mount Sinai. And what is the other half of the parallel? The second woman is Abraham’s legitimate wife, the free-born Sarah: she is the mother of Isaac, the true inheritor of God’s promise, Abraham’s spiritual heir. In a manner unspecified, Paul links his gentile readers with Isaac; they too are children of the promise, children of Sarah, who is symbolized by the heavenly Jerusalem. This represents the source of the new covenant.

Paul strains for some of this allegory, but on the surface the whole thing might seem to hang together. Yet something is definitely missing here. Something we would expect to find, especially as Christ “born of woman” is still fresh in Paul’s mind. He is talking about mothers and sons. Why is Mary not worked into this analogy, if only as a secondary part of the interpretation? She was, after all, the mother of Jesus himself who established the new covenant. She is surely an antitype to Sarah’s archetype. So is Jesus himself to Isaac, both symbols of sacrificed victims. (Even though Isaac was not actually killed, he assumed this significance in Jewish thinking.) Paul has spent much of Galatians 3 linking the gentiles to Abraham through Christ as his “seed”: why not double such a link through Mary and Sarah? Could not Mary be allegorized as the mother of Christians? And where, for that matter, is the thing which should have been obvious as the symbol of the new covenant, in parallel to Mount Sinai as the symbol of the old one: not the heavenly Jerusalem but the Mount of Calvary where Jesus was crucified, the earthly site of the blood sacrifice which established that new covenant? Paul once again shows himself to be totally immune in his thought and expression to all aspects of the incarnated life of Jesus of Nazareth.

In “Flesh” and “Blood”

It should be clear by now that Christ in the spiritual realm possessed properties which could be called “flesh” and “blood”—in that state which the spirit world bore in counterpart with the world of matter. As Hebrews 2:14 says: “Since (Christ’s children) have blood and flesh, he too shared the same things in a like manner.” This will recall the discussion above concerning inter-world relationships based on the pattern of “likeness.” We find such a stereotyped emphasis in several places, in Jesus being “like” or “in the form of” a man. In the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11, Christ descends, “bearing human likeness and the fashion of a man.” Why this oblique phraseology: had he not literally been a full, actual man? In the Ascension of Isaiah 9, the spirits of the heavens which the Son enters and where he is crucified, “think he is flesh and a man.” Here the clear implication is that he is not, that he has assumed only some related resemblance. In the Hebrews quote above, the word for “in a like manner” is “*paraplesios*”. This does not mean “identical,” but “near to, similar.” (This is fortunate for Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:27: if his illness had been identical to death, Paul would be writing an obituary and not praising God for his colleague’s recovery.)

But the concept of a god possessing the spiritual world equivalent of flesh and blood needs to be qualified in certain ways. As examined in greater detail in Supplementary Article No. 3, some

savior gods were envisioned as descending from the highest sphere of heaven, where in their pure spirit form they could not suffer, and to take on the semblance of flesh as they reached the lower celestial layers. Here they could undergo human-like experiences, suffer and die. Paul seems to have seen Christ's suffering as real, that is, Christ's flesh and blood were close enough to the real thing that he genuinely suffered, in contrast to more sophisticated philosophers (such as Plutarch, Sallustius and the emperor Julian: see Bibliography), who, as mentioned above, regarded the various savior god myths as merely symbolic of abstract spiritual processes.

The term "in flesh" (*en sarki*, or *kata sarka*) is also a stereotyped phrase in the early Christian epistles. If we take into account C. K. Barrett's suggestion in his translation of Romans 1:3 (see above), it may simply have signified the entry of Christ "into the sphere of flesh," which included that lower celestial realm where Satan and the demon spirits dwelled and wreaked their havoc on the material world. (Again, see Supplementary Article No. 3.)

In more general terms, the phrase may have served to signify the world of myth itself, where gods acted out their roles concerning salvation and paradigmatic action. The Greeks, too, could spin stories about their deities, born in caves, slain by other divinities, sleeping and dining and speaking in human-sounding ways, and none of it was now regarded as taking place in history or on earth itself. (The story of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23f fits into the same category as the sacred meal myths of the Greek cults, and is something devised by Paul through perceived revelation—he received it "from the Lord"; I have dealt with this at length in Supplementary Article No. 6, in the section "Learning of a Sacred Meal," and will not repeat it here.) The bull dispatched by Mithras was not historical; the blood it spilled which vitalized the earth was metaphysical. No one searched the soil of Asia Minor hoping to unearth the genitals severed from the Great Mother's consort Attis. To which we might compare first-century Christianity's utter disinterest in the places and relics of Jesus' activities (see Part One).

And so we have 1 Peter's "put to death in flesh" (3:18, followed by a rising "in spirit"), 1 Timothy's (3:16) "manifested in flesh" (where it says he was seen only by angels); the latter is part of a hymn which the writer calls a "pious mystery," another of God's secrets rather than an historically witnessed event. We are told in Colossians 1:22 that God has reconciled humanity to himself "by (Christ's) death in the body of his flesh." And Hebrews 5:7 tells us something which Christ had done "in the days of his flesh," something derived from verses in scripture.

In Hebrews 10:5, Christ is spoken of as "coming into the world," but this is the world of scripture that Christ is entering, in its timeless, mythical present—or rather, the higher mythical world onto which scripture provided a window. (These and other examples of the "human" elements assigned to Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews will be dealt with more fully in Supplementary Article No. 9.)

Christ as “Man”

We can now proceed to what is perhaps the most significant term used by Paul which seems to speak of Jesus as an historical person. This is the word “man”: *anthropos*. The only other document to give Jesus this label is 1 Timothy (2:5) but this can easily be seen to be dependent on Paul and adds nothing to what Paul himself says. Paul uses the expression in three passages: Romans 5:12-19, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 and 15:45-49. In all three, the concept is part of a comparison with another “man”: Adam.

We have to recognize that one of Paul’s main concerns in these passages is to create a parallel and a contrast. He is setting up Christ as an antithesis to Adam, and therefore he wishes to present his divine figure in ways which can fit this position, both philosophically and poetically. Let’s begin with Romans 5. Paul offers the view (one he shared with a central line of Jewish thought) that Adam was responsible for the introduction of sin—and its consequence, death—into the world; after him, all men have also sinned and fallen under the power of death, a fate cutting its universal swath throughout human history. At the other end of this baneful pendulum’s swing lies Christ. By God’s “grace in the one man Jesus Christ,” (simply an expansion of Paul’s common phrase “in Christ”: see Part Two), sin and its consequences have been swept away. In the interests of his parallel and contrast with Adam, Paul calls Christ “man.”

But Paul is also interested in something more. An important feature of early Christian thought is the need to find archetypal figures or events in scripture which serve as “models” for later figures and events, especially those to do with Christian beliefs and expectations. (Perhaps a more ‘horizontal’ version of the vertical correspondence envisioned between higher and lower worlds.) So Paul needs Adam to represent a “type” of which Christ is the “antitype.” This is clear from what he says in Romans 5:14: “. . . and Adam foreshadows the Man who was to come.” This NEB translation, as so many of them do, once again reads Gospel preconceptions into a text which is at best ambiguous. Literally, “. . . Adam, who is the type of the one coming,” may mean one who was to come in the past, or one who is still to come. (We’ll take a closer look at this telling phrase later.)

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul sets up further parallels and contrasts, types and antitypes. Adam is the “first man” and Christ is the “second man” or “last Adam.” Adam was the prototype for all humans in his earthly body; Christ will provide the prototype of the heavenly body which all Christians will receive at their resurrection. Thus Paul’s overall presentation of Christ as “man” serves his theological and literary purposes.

Actually, Paul uses the word “*anthropos*” of Christ only three times throughout the three passages. He seems to be more interested in calling Christ the last *Adam* (which in Hebrew means “man”) in order to provide an antithesis to the first Adam, rather than in making any statement that Christ was a human man. We should also remember that Adam himself was in current Jewish thought a larger-than-life figure, almost mythological, which would make Christ as “man” in a heavenly, mythical sense more comparable with him. Both, for Paul, are representative figures, not historical individuals.

But on what basis can Paul call Christ “man” if he was not a recent human being who had lived and died in Palestine? Paul is making a statement about the divine Son, labeling him “man” as one of his attributes. His starting point is the spiritual Christ in heaven, not a recent human being who had walked the earth in historical times. Such a man he never refers to; such a man is notably missing in his presentation of Adam and Christ, especially in the second Corinthians

passage, as we shall see. In what way, then, can a divinity in heaven, one who has never been on earth, be spoken of as “man”?

The Heavenly Man

The answer is a complex one—and uncertain, for there is more than one way Paul could have viewed things. And the question involves a much-debated type of speculative thinking in ancient myth about which we know too little. Even to make generalized statements about the concept known as the “Heavenly Man” (or Primal Man, Archetypal Man) is difficult, since its various expressions show little consistency and the evidence is largely fragmentary. But we can approach it through a writer who has left us enough to provide one specific view of the idea: the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo.

In adapting Platonic-style ideas about a Heavenly Man to the Jewish scriptures, Philo had invaluable, if unintended, help from the compilers of the Book of Genesis. Centuries earlier these editors had found themselves with two different creation stories on their hands, both old, from different parts of the nation. They ended up largely juxtaposing them in the first two chapters of the Bible’s opening book. And so someone like Philo could read these two separate statements in the sacred writings:

Then God said: Let us make man in our image. . . . So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him. . . .” (Genesis 1:26-27)

Then the Lord God formed a man (or Adam) from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Genesis 2:7)

What better evidence that God was a Platonist? For the first statement, in Genesis 1, surely described the creation of the Platonic *Idea* of man, the spiritual prototype in heaven. He was part of the creation of the whole “intelligible world” (the one known by intellectual understanding), that upper realm of ideal, perfect things of which the lower world of matter, the “perceivable world” (the one known by the senses), was only an imperfect copy.

Genesis 2, on the other hand, recounted the creation of the ideal man’s copy, made out of the dust of matter. It is the first—spiritual—“man” who is said to be made “in the image of God,” and this fitted the Platonic conception of God’s emanations forming the first “being” apart from himself, his direct image, his “first-born.” (This Philo sometimes identifies with his general term “Logos” which he uses for the sum of God’s primary emanations and powers which work on the universe.)

But let’s quote Philo’s own words:

“There are two kinds of men. The one is Heavenly Man, the other earthly. The Heavenly Man being in the image of God has no part in corruptible substance, or in any earthly substance whatever; but the earthly man was made of germinal matter which the writer [of Genesis] calls “dust.” For this reason he does not say that the Heavenly Man was created, but that he was stamped with the image of God, whereas the earthly man is a creature and not the offspring of the Creator.” (From Allegorical Interpretation of the Law 1,31, translated by C. H. Dodd.)

In speaking of God’s “image” Philo is not referring to anything anthropomorphic, for God possessed no “shape” and certainly not a human one. Elsewhere, Philo says that “the word ‘image’ refers to the mind which is the governor of the soul.” He regards the earthly material copy of the Heavenly Man as a replica only in an internal way, sharing the higher divinity—and

being ultimately a copy of God himself—only in regard to his soul, not his outward appearance. The Heavenly Man is incorporeal and incorruptible, neither male nor female; he remains transcendent in heaven with God. (For more on Philo of Alexandria, see Supplementary Article No. 5.)

The dualistic Platonic distinction between a celestial man and an earthly man seems not to have been made in more mainstream Jewish thinking about Genesis. Rather, Adam himself tended to be glorified by the rabbis and made into a prototype, an extraordinary First Man of far greater scope than we see in the familiar Genesis—almost mythological. Other parts of the Old Testament show traces of a legendary first man as a kind of demi-god, exceedingly wise and sharing God’s counsel. (See Job 15:7f and Ezekiel 28.)

And what of the broader Hellenistic world? What connection did such a glorified Adam in Jewish tradition have with what seems to have been a more widespread myth of a Primal Man (which scholars usually refer to by the German term “Ur-mensch”)? This Primal Man used to be thought of as deriving from ancient Iranian and Babylonian mythology. He was a heavenly being, a first-born, who existed with God from the beginning, sometimes as a king of paradise. He was involved in struggles in the heavenly realms with forces of evil and chaos. Out of these struggles the world of matter and humans came into existence. In some versions, humanity even contains fallen portions of this Primal Man. Eventually he becomes a Redeemer who descends to earth, reveals God to humans and the fact that they possess divine elements within themselves; finally, he shows them how to ascend to heaven and regain their original divine home.

In some Gnostic documents, the figure just described is only a “son” or “son of Man,” for in that ‘chain of generation’ mentioned near the beginning, the Primal Man is the supreme God himself, since in him lies the image of all creation, including material man. Some have suggested that the Gospel term “Son of Man” may have arisen from this meaning, that the coming End-time figure is the Son of God, referred to as Man.

Lately there has been more skepticism about the pervasiveness of a Primal Man myth in pre-Christian times. Such ideas emerge clearly only in the Gnostic faiths of the 2nd century and in the later Mandaean and Manichaean religions centered in Mesopotamia. The debate rages around the question of how far back we may read such doctrines into earlier mythical thought. Might early strands of Gnosticism have existed in centers like Antioch? Did they have a form which could have influenced Paul and others? If Paul seems to cast things in a more Jewish mold, had his Jewish milieu, especially through its connections with Persia and Babylon, already absorbed the effects of such Oriental myths?

These questions cannot yet be answered, if ever they can. Perhaps ultimately we are thrown back on analyzing what Paul himself actually says. It is legitimate to keep in mind, however, that a broader pool of ideas about a Heavenly Man were part of ancient world thought, regardless of just when the surviving evidence allows us to place any specifics chronologically; and that the Alexandrian Philo, who largely precedes Paul, clearly shows one very important type of “heavenly man” to which Paul’s concept might be compared.

The Physical and the Spiritual

But let's turn to the Pauline passages themselves and see what can be gleaned from them. The most important for our purposes is 1 Corinthians 15:44b-49. Here it is in a more-or-less literal rendition based on standard translations:

[44b] If there is (such a thing as) a natural/physical body, there is also a spiritual (body). [45] And so it is written: "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; the last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit. [46] However, the spiritual (body) is not first; rather, the material (one), then the spiritual. [47] The first man (was) out of the earth, of earthly (material), the second man (is) out of heaven. [48] As the man of earth (was), so also (are) those of earth; and as (is) the man of heaven, so also (are/shall be?) those of heaven (or the heavenly beings). [49] And as we bore the image of the one of earth, we shall also bear the image of the one of heaven.

There can be few passages in the epistles where scholars are more guilty of reading into the bare words all that they wish to see in them. The first thing to note is that there is a lot of ambiguity in this passage, for Paul has left out almost all the verbs. Some of those supplied are natural, but read the passage without the words in brackets and one can see how much critical ambiguity resides in the sense of it all. Translators tend to use verbs and prepositions which connote the idea of Christ as someone who recently came from heaven down to earth, fitting the Gospel presentation. (As Jean Héring puts it, Christ "descended from heaven.") But the Greek words convey no necessary sense of movement. We can compare a similar common misreading of 15:21:

For since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought resurrection of the dead. (NEB)

Here such verbs are supplied by the translators. Literally, the sentence reads: "For since through a man death, also through a man resurrection of the dead." The verbs usually inserted convey the sense of some recent event on earth, yet the next verse, 22, actually points to the future: "So in Christ all will be brought to life," which may be closer to Paul's concept of Jesus as "man": something oriented toward the future. We'll look at this point more closely in a moment.

But the most critical mistranslation occurs in verse 45:

The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit. The verb "became" (*egeneto*) governs both parts, the references to both Adam and Christ. Yet the English "became" is misleading, for it suggests a conversion from one thing, one state, to another. This is indeed one of the meanings of "*ginomai*" but it cannot be so here, for such a concept cannot apply to Adam. Paul must mean *ginomai* in the more fundamental of its senses, that of "coming into existence as," to form the nature of, for he surely means that Adam was *created as* "a living soul" (just as the Genesis passage he is quoting does). He is defining Adam here, not speaking of a change from one state into another. (The preposition "*eis*" need not denote "into" in the sense of conversion, but has more the sense of "as" in a predicate accusative phrase, like 1 Maccabees 11:62: "He took the sons as hostages.")

It follows that the second half of the verse (where the verb is only understood) should imply the same thing: that Christ is of the nature of a life-giving spirit, not that he went from some previous state to another state. Yet the latter is the way scholars like to interpret it—indeed, they are forced to do so: their preconceptions about an historical Jesus require them to maintain that Paul is referring to Jesus' state only after his resurrection, when he had taken on a spiritual body,

even if this is not borne out by the text or its context. Jean Héring (*1 Corinthians*, p.175) is the only commentator I have seen who provides what I suggest is the proper kind of translation:

The first Adam was created to have a living nature, the second Adam to be a life-giving spirit.

This removes any implied reference to the resurrection of Christ. We are thus left with a passage (verses 35-57) which focuses on the resurrection of Christians and what form their raised body will take, and yet one which makes not the slightest glance toward Jesus' own resurrection—an amazing silence! The scholarly claim that Paul is describing the body Christians will receive in terms of the one possessed by Christ after his resurrection has no foundation in the text.

An Impossible Silence

Paul's silence on this point is extremely revealing. If by the term "man" Paul were referring to Jesus of Nazareth, the historical figure, then such a silence could not be allowed to stand, for it would get Paul into all sorts of difficulties. The recent presence of Christ on earth as an "earthly" man would destroy Paul's carefully crafted antithesis. Note how he compares Adam and Christ. The main point of contrast is that the first "man"—Adam—is made of earthly material; this material corresponds to the "flesh" which Paul has been discussing in the previous verses (35-44a), where he contrasts earthly bodies of flesh with heavenly bodies, the sun and stars which were regarded as spirit beings or angels. He sums up (verse 44a) by saying that the present "physical" body of the Christian is to be raised as a "spiritual" body, which for him is something completely different in substance from the physical one.

This is the whole point of his discussion, that the spiritual body will be something new and different. His purpose here is to counter those in Corinth who seem to have denied the resurrection of the dead because they could conceive only of the resurrection of the physical body, something Greeks generally rejected as repugnant. Paul is presenting an alternative: the resurrection body will be a spiritual body, modeled on Christ's own.

But how can he do this? How can he go on to offer the last Adam, Christ, as the prototype for the resurrected body of Christians? For Christ himself, when on earth, would have possessed a body not of heavenly material but of earthly stuff, the same as Adam's. If Paul's term "man" as applied to Christ refers to the man Jesus of Nazareth—which most scholars declare it does—this ruins everything, for that man did not possess a spiritual body but one made of the same, physical, material which Christians are now composed of. It would be absolutely necessary for Paul to clarify things. If at no other place in his letters, here he would have to make a clear reference to the historical Jesus. He would have to point out that the "man" he is referring to, the body which this "man" possesses, is not the body he had when he was on earth, the one of dust like Adam's, but rather the one he now possesses subsequent to his resurrection. A clear reference to the resurrection as producing a change of state would be unavoidable.

Scholars, of course, declare that this is implied. But a mind as precise and comprehensive as Paul's would not have left this ambiguity hanging in the air, especially when it could have been dealt with in little more than a phrase. He could not have gone on to align earthly beings with the earthly man Adam, and heavenly beings with the heavenly man Christ, and totally ignore one glaring loose end: what was the earthly man Jesus of Nazareth to be related to? How did he fit into this neat, two-compartment picture of things? (I am not, of course, questioning here that Paul believes in Christ's resurrection, which he refers to often; but neither here nor anywhere else is that resurrection presented as one from an historical human body to a divine heavenly one.)

But more than that. There is something else which Paul could not possibly have ignored, an opportunity he would never have passed up. If Christ is now a “spirit,” possessing purely heavenly stuff, then he provides the perfect illustration for the point Paul is striving to make. For Jesus of Nazareth, from his physical, earthly body passed through resurrection and took on a different spiritual body. Is this not exactly what Paul is contending will happen to his own readers? Why would Paul pass up the ideal analogy in Jesus’ own resurrection?

This also raises a collateral difficulty, but perhaps the reader is already ahead of me. Paul here and elsewhere is stating, adamantly and unambiguously, that human resurrection is to a new state. As he says in verses 50-53: “flesh and blood can never possess the kingdom of God . . . the dead will rise immortal and we shall be changed . . . mortality will be clothed with immortality.” Robin Scroggs (*The Last Adam*, p.93) is forced to conclude that verses 47-50 “indicate that for the Apostle his Lord rose from the dead in a spiritual body.” What then would Paul make of the Gospel tradition that Jesus rose in the flesh, that he appeared to his disciples in earthly form, and even let Thomas press his fingers into his fleshly side and wound? If Christ (in the scholars’ context of ‘implication’) were to provide a parallel to the fate in store for Christians, a resurrection not into flesh but into spirit, how would Paul deal with this contradiction? How could Jesus serve as a model if his own resurrection experience doesn’t fit Paul’s presentation of things? The very fact—according to the Gospel story—that Jesus had risen from flesh to flesh would present a glaring anomaly with the pattern of resurrection that Paul is setting up in this passage, and would have to be dealt with.

By now, of course, we know that Paul nowhere addresses such complications. By now, the reasoning reader must realize that Paul knows of no bodily resurrection, of no recent physical incarnation, no human Jesus of Nazareth. When Paul wrote, no story of the empty tomb existed; the graphic accounts presented in the Gospels were unknown to him. Scroggs goes on to allow that Paul understood that Christ had appeared to him (the vision described in 1 Corinthians 15:8) in an entirely spiritual form, and that he equated this appearance with the appearances to all the others (the ones described in verses 5-7). Modern critical scholars have recently come to acknowledge that they were all the same (see Supplementary Article No. 6). Scroggs, writing in 1966, contents himself with remarking that “the New Testament church does not agree about the nature of Christ’s resurrection body.”

Paul’s Heavenly Man

We can now go back to 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 and take a fresh look at things. If the last man is a life-giving spirit, the term “man” is obviously being used of a heavenly figure. Since no qualification is put on this to relate it to a previous physical state of this “man” on earth, since there is no addressing of the complications which all that the latter would involve, we are justified in concluding that the concept of a purely “heavenly man” exists for Paul, and that Christ is such a man. Here we also see another Christian thinker (cf. Hebrews 10:5, above) using the term “body” and locating it in the spiritual world, which allows us, by implication, to do the same for terms like “flesh” and “blood.”

Most scholars cannot bring themselves to such plain conclusions. Moffat (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.258f) fudges Christ’s spiritual body and Paul’s rigid separation between physical and spiritual by offering a far too sophisticated—and modern—reading of Paul’s thought, no doubt wishing to preserve the later Apostles’ Creed declaration that we shall indeed be resurrected in the flesh. Scroggs (*op.cit.*, p.100f) recognizes that Paul calls Christ “man” even though in a spiritual body, and so he is led to define Christ’s heavenly nature as “human,” a prime example of forcing words into so-called meanings which exist only in the minds of those who must engage in this kind of double-think. To justify this by defining “human” as the post-

resurrection destiny of human beings after the End, using phrases like “eschatological humanity” and “true man,” could only be done by a theologian. It need hardly be said that Paul himself gives us no hint in the text of all this tortured, implicit meaning.

Paul makes straightforward statements about his heavenly man. As opposed to Adam, who was of earth and made of earthly stuff (“the dust of the earth,” as many translations put it), the second man is “out of heaven” (*ex ouranou*), meaning he belongs to, or is a product of heaven, just as Adam is “out of earth” (*ek ges*). Here again we can see the problem of misleading translations, for if *ex ouranou* is rendered “from heaven,” implying that Christ came to earth from there, this makes nonsense of the *ek ges*, for where did Adam come to “from earth”? No, the preposition in both places (it’s the same one) simply means that each figure belongs to its own sphere. Adam is a part of earth, made of earth (*choikos*); Christ is a part of heaven, made of heavenly stuff (understood). Scroggs calls it non-corporeal and “like that of the angels.” It is this heavenly stuff which resurrected Christians will take on; they shall bear Christ’s “image,” meaning his nature, as verse 49 states.

One final point: the so-called sequence of “first” and “second/last” is automatically assumed to support an understanding of Christ as a recent historical person. He arrived “second”—in history—in contrast to Adam who was, historically, the first man. If Paul, it is claimed, were reflecting some kind of Primal Man idea, or Platonic concept of prototypic man, Christ would need to be ranked first, before or higher than Adam. Perhaps so, but there is nothing to prevent Paul from coming up with a special ranking for his own purposes, one he can justify. Here Paul’s need is to provide a parallel to the destiny of Christians, to their progression from an earthly body to a spiritual body (verse 46). He may legitimately present Adam and Christ in the order in which these respective “men” had an effect on humanity. At the beginning Adam brought sin and death into the world, but in this present, final age it is the man of heaven who has been revealed, the one who provides salvation from sin and death and a prototype for the resurrection body.

A Man Yet To Come

But there is another, simpler way of regarding Paul’s sequence, one which helps us to define more closely his concept of “heavenly man,” Christ is the heavenly man who will be arriving on earth at the imminent End-time. The other pole of Paul’s “historical” sequence lies in the future. This eschatological meaning Paul points to in his use of the word “last” (*eschaton*), which he interchanges with “second” (*deuteros*). In fact, Paul earlier in 1 Corinthians 15 does more than point, he spells it out for us. The action of Christ in bringing resurrection to Christians lies not in the recent past, but in the future, at the Parousia:

As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life; but each in its proper order: Christ the firstfruits [i.e., at his own resurrection, a mythical one] and afterwards, at his coming [the Parousia], those who belong to Christ. [15:22-23]

Now we can see the critical nature of that ambiguity in the texts which is so often given an historical slant when verbs are supplied. Any “coming” from heaven, any “bringing” of resurrection, needs to be placed not in the past, not in any recent life of Jesus of Nazareth, but in the future. When Paul in Romans 5:14 says that “Adam foreshadows the man to come,” (literally, the one coming), he is not speaking of an incarnated Jesus but of the heavenly man (like the Gospel “Son of Man,” though Paul never uses this term) who will arrive at the Parousia to judge, resurrect the righteous and establish God’s Kingdom.

Now, perhaps, we can even allow for some sense of movement “from heaven” in the way Paul describes him, the sense which translators inevitably try to work in. But this is a movement which has not yet occurred. Barrett (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.376) assumes this eschatological meaning, but then runs up against a glaring silence, which he blithely dismisses with this comment: “It is not part of Paul’s argument here to say that the heavenly man has already come in the form of earthly man.” Unqueried assumptions are a great pacifier, and Barrett has managed to close his mind to the impossibility of Paul making such a statement which makes no allowance, stated or unstated, for any previous “coming” of this eschatological man. Witness also Barrett’s comment on 15:22. Here (p.353) he admits that Paul speaks of neither Adam’s nor Christ’s activities specifically in terms of historical events. Yet: “As Paul knew, this event had happened very recently, and its character as an historical event raised no doubt or problem in his mind.” The ability to read such a mind, and to absolve it of the problems it never had an inkling of, is clearly an invaluable asset in interpreting such passages.

Thus, in the end, Paul’s “heavenly man” may be a relatively simple one to understand, the man essentially of Jewish apocalyptic expectation, though for Paul his Messiah is a divine one. Still, we can sense vibrations from other trends of thought, which undoubtedly fed into Paul’s formulations. Like Philo, Paul’s heavenly man is a resident of the spiritual world and incorporeal, not made of matter. Like the related Platonic concept, he is pre-existent and provides a pattern, the substance of what Christians will become when they are resurrected. Whether other “Primal Man” influences are present is difficult to say. But passages like Romans 8:29 show that Christ for Paul is the prototypic “first-born” of God’s sons (in that ‘chain of generation’), believing Christians being his younger brothers, modeled after the eldest. Finally, as in current Jewish exegetical practice, the heavenly man provides a “type,” though Paul has also placed him at the other pole of the antithesis and makes Adam the “type” for Christ.

Much of all this is simply an intellectual exercise on Paul’s part and no one but the theologian should feel constrained to invest it with some kind of cosmic reality. Paul was a preacher, one who pored over the sacred writings, a deep thinker in the darkness of the night, no doubt. He read things, absorbed influences from the world around him, and constructed his philosophical fantasies according to his needs. In the glaring absence of any identification of his “heavenly man” with the recent earthly Jesus of Nazareth, we are fully entitled to place Paul’s *anthropos* within the larger, contemporary philosophical setting of the time, Jewish and Greek, leavened through his own intellect and faith.

And to conclude that this “man” had nothing to do with an historical Jesus.

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A Sacrifice In Heaven **The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews**

-- I --

A New Son and Covenant

More than any other New Testament document, the Epistle to the Hebrews contains all the elements needed to understand the general nature of early cultic Christianity. This, despite the fact that it is often styled an anomaly, even “an alien presence in the New Testament” (L. D. Hurst, *Hebrews: Its Background and Thought*, p.1), since its presentation of Christ is so unique.

Who the writer is, where he writes, whom he is addressing remain unknown. But in this carefully crafted treatise, the author of Hebrews is speaking to a group which has been founded on a revelatory experience at some time in the past (2:3-4; see Supplementary Article No. 7), a group which now shares a distinctive christology and sectarian outlook. They expect the end of the present world to arrive shortly (1:2, 3:14, etc.). The community has known persecution (10:32f) and is perhaps in danger of losing its faith or fervor, thus prompting this treatise. The thought world of the epistle is strongly Jewish (though of a variety outside the mainstream and with Hellenistic elements), and if as some suggest the writer is part of a gentile community, then it is one which has fully absorbed and adopted a Jewish identity. The epistle tends to be dated fairly early, between 60 and 90, and many lean toward locating it before the destruction of the Temple in 70, since nothing of that event surfaces in the author’s focus on the sacrificial cult.

Those elements in Hebrews which reveal the nature of incipient Christianity lie surprisingly clear to the eye, and they begin at the very head of the epistle. Here are the opening four verses, courtesy of the New English Bible:

¹When in former times God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets. ²But in this final age (literally, these last days) he has spoken to us in the Son (en huio), whom he has made heir to the whole universe, and through whom he created all orders of existence: ³the Son who is the effulgence of God’s splendor and the stamp of God’s very being, and sustains the universe by his word of power. When he had brought about the purgation of sins, he took his seat at the right hand of Majesty on high, ⁴raised as far above the angels as the title he has inherited is superior to theirs.

The fundamental theology of this community is a belief in the Son, and here the author defines this entity. His concept fits into the widespread Hellenistic doctrine of the “Logos”—though the word itself does not appear anywhere in the epistle in this sense—and the language closely resembles that used of Jewish personified Wisdom in *The Wisdom of Solomon* (as in 7:26), an important document of Hellenistic Judaism written most likely in Alexandria early in the first century CE. Here Wisdom has been cast in a Logos mold.

Hebrews’ “Son” reflects the dominant religious philosophy of the age, that the ultimate God emanates a force or secondary divinity that constitutes his image, one who has served to effect creation and who provides the ongoing sustaining power of the universe. The Son is also an intermediary channel between heaven and earth, and for this group, as for so many others on the Christian cultic scene (compare 1 John 5:20), he conforms to another aspect of personified Wisdom in that he serves as the voice of God to humanity, revealing knowledge about the Deity

and the availability of salvation. Finally, in a feature shared by not quite so many early Christian groups, this sect regards the Son as an agent of salvation through a sacrifice for sin.

This doctrine is what the writer will concentrate on throughout the epistle. He will cast it in a unique setting and christology which lies outside standard Logos concepts and takes up residence in that most ancient of Jewish institutions: the sacrificial cult of the Temple as it became embodied in the legends of the Exodus and the establishment of the first covenant on Mount Sinai. For the community of Hebrews, the Son Jesus Christ is the spiritual High Priest whose sacrifice in heaven has established a new covenant to supplant the old.

A Missing Equation and a Silent Voice

For all that is said about the Son here and throughout this longest of the New Testament epistles after Romans, we should immediately note what is *not* said. First, no equation is ever made of this divine figure with the human man Jesus of Nazareth, known to later Christianity from the Gospels. As we shall see, the Son inhabits not an earthly setting, but a higher world revealed by scripture; more than one passage tells us, in fact, that he had never been to earth (see Epilogue). In the opening verses quoted above, the writer alludes to the Son's work of salvation, a bare statement that he had "brought about the purgation of sins" (v.3). Not only does this lack any context of a life on earth, the act itself will be placed by the writer in a heavenly sanctuary, a spiritual world setting of a Platonic type. Here we can see that the earliest expression of Christ belief had nothing to do with a reaction to an historical preaching sage and everything to do with the heady expressions of contemporary Greek and Jewish philosophy, about the unseen realm of heaven and the various manifestations of Deity which existed there.

In that unseen reality, the writer is concerned with establishing certain things about the Son. If we go on from verse 4 above, we find that one of these is that he is "superior to the angels." To prove this, the writer quotes several passages from the Psalms and elsewhere, comparing what God says about the angels with what he says (as the writer sees it) about the Son. The latter includes Psalm 2:7's famous: "Thou art my Son; today I have begotten you." In quoting Psalm 45:6, the writer seems to regard the Son as being addressed by the term "God." Psalm 102's declaration that through the Son was the earth's foundation laid, and Psalm 110's invitation to the Son to sit at God's right hand, proves for the writer that he is "superior to the angels." But should we not wonder why the writer did not think to appeal to the Son's incarnation, to his life and ministry on earth, to his rising from the tomb, to prove such a superiority? In fact, one of the glaring silences in this epistle is the failure to mention the resurrection at all! For that, Jean Héring (*Hebrews*, p.xi) calls this work "an enigma."

What the writer is doing, of course, is using scripture to cast light on the workings of the higher realm. Jesus the Son, together with the angels, are exclusively spiritual figures, part of the paraphernalia of heaven, with Jesus defined (as in 1:3) in thoroughly mythological terms. The writer needs to rank the heavenly Christ above the angels because he regards him as the agency of the new covenant, whereas the angels have been associated with the delivering of the old covenant, now superseded. Christ's proven superiority will support the superiority of this new covenant and the validity of the community's covenant theology. In the face of such a need, it is unthinkable that all aspects of the Son's nature and activities would not be appealed to. Héring's "enigma" is a pale judgment on the pervasive and inexplicable silence in this epistle about every aspect of Jesus' career on earth. (Those handful of references which scholars like to point to as allusions to Gospel details are better seen as dependent on scripture and will be dealt with later in this article.)

Our second focus on what is *not* said in Hebrews proceeds from the opening declaration, that in this final age God has “spoken to us in (or through) the Son.” Is it feasible that, after expressing such a sentiment, the writer would go on through 13 chapters and never once give us a word of what this Son spoke on earth? Not a single Gospel saying is introduced, not even a reference to the fact itself that Jesus had taught in a human ministry. Chapter 2 begins with the idea that “we must pay heed to the things we were told,” but this is evidently not to include the words delivered by the Son while on earth, since they are never presented. And when the writer goes on to refer to the experience which lay at the inauguration of the sect, the “announcement of salvation through the Lord” (2:3-4), this is clearly a revelatory event he is describing, and not any ministry of Jesus. (See *The Launching of a Sect* in Supplementary Article No. 7, Transfigured on the Holy Mountain, for a fuller discussion of this passage.)

In Hebrews, the “voice” of the Son comes entirely from scripture, and it is a voice which speaks in the present, not from the past. When the author first quotes the Son’s perceived words in the Psalms and Isaiah (2:12-13), he introduces them in the present tense: “he says” (the Greek present participle *legon*). The Son is an entity who is known and communicates now and today, through the sacred writings.

The words in these particular quotations are used to illustrate the contention that the Son is not ashamed to call believers his brothers. Yet more than one commentator has wondered why, instead of going to the Old Testament to prove his point, the writer does not draw on any of Jesus’ several statements on the subject, as recorded in the Gospels. Why not Luke 8:21 (and parallels): “My brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.” Or Mark 3:35: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother.” Or Matthew 25:40: “Anything you did for one of my brothers . . . you did for me.” Even John 20:17 might have served: “Go to my brothers and tell them that I am now ascending to my Father. . .” Does the writer lack all knowledge of such sayings by Jesus in an earthly ministry?

Graham Hughes, in his study of Hebrews (*Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, p.62), shows to what bizarre lengths scholars can go in order to account for such silences. He questions why the writer did not draw on those Gospel sayings which “coincide” with the Old Testament verses he actually uses. Hughes’ first assumption is that such sayings *were* well known to the author. So much so, he says, that he regarded the Old Testament quotations as “forms” of the Gospel sayings. Thus, “the former can now be appropriated to give expression to the latter.” Once the brain stops spinning, the reader may well ask: why should the author pass up quoting Jesus’ sayings themselves in favor of quoting Old Testament verses which ‘stand for them’? If he wants to “give expression to” the sayings, why not just quote the sayings? This is a good example of a common scholarly practice of defining something as its opposite: the absence of any Gospel sayings in Hebrews is really a quotation of those sayings through their Old Testament prefigurations!

In actuality, all we have in Hebrews are those Old Testament verses. They show that the voice of the Son through which God speaks in this final age is the voice heard in a new interpretation of the sacred writings, that for sects like the one which produced this epistle, scripture provides a window onto the higher world where God and the Son do their work and communicate with humanity.

A Spirit World Body

If we go on to 10:5-7, things become even clearer. Here the Son speaks in what might be styled a “mythical present” through a passage from Psalm 40 (actually, from the Septuagint version, No. 39, showing that the community lives in a Hellenistic milieu, not a Hebrew one):

That is why, at his coming into the world, he says:
“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire,
But thou hast prepared a body for me.
Whole-offerings and sin-offerings thou didst not delight in.
Then I said: ‘Here am I: as it is written of me in the scroll,
I have come, O God, to do thy will.’ ”

How do scholars approach this seemingly odd mode of expression? The writer presents Christ as speaking in the present (“he says”). Yet this speaking is “at his coming into the world,” which must also be in the same present. Such actions are placed not in history, but in scripture, in whatever the writer regards as represented by the words of the Psalm. Nor does he show any sense of confusion between this “coming” and any recent coming of Jesus into the world in an historical sense, at Bethlehem or on earth generally.

But confusion among commentators abounds. Héring (*Hebrews*, p.84f) simply translates the verb into the past tense, without comment. Hugh Montefiore (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.166) suggests that the coming into the world refers to Christ’s “human conception or his human birth,” and that the writer regards the Psalm as reporting Jesus’ words to the Father at such a moment. Paul Ellingworth (*New International Greek Testament Commentary, Hebrews*, p.499) assumes that the writer hears Christ speaking through scripture prior to his human incarnation. All this is something that has to be read into the epistle’s words, for of birth and incarnation in an historical setting it has nothing to say.

Ellingworth (p.500) points to a promising interpretation of the “he says,” calling it “a timeless present referring to the permanent record of scripture.” We are skirting Platonic ideas here, with their concept of a higher world of timeless reality. Why not suggest, then, that the writer views scripture as presenting a picture of spiritual world realities, and it is in this spiritual world that Christ operates? The writer of Hebrews has gone to the sacred writings for the story of Christ, the newly revealed “Son.” In that case, the “he says” (here and throughout the epistle) becomes a mythical present, reflecting the higher world of myth, which seems to be the common universe of so many early Christian writers.

In this passage, we can see the type of source which could have given rise to the idea that the spiritual Son had taken on or entered “flesh,” as well as the idea that he had undergone sacrifice. At first this was envisioned as taking place within the lower celestial realm. For the writer of Hebrews, this would have placed the Son “for a short while . . . lower than the angels” (2:9). Into this mythological realm Christ had “come” to receive the body prepared for him, to provide a new sacrifice and a new covenant to supplant the old one with its animal sacrifices which God no longer wanted. (As we shall see, the writer’s concept of exactly where the divine death itself had taken place is somewhat vague. Instead, he focuses on Christ’s subsequent actions in the heavenly sanctuary, offering his blood to God in a higher world parallel to the earthly sacrificial cult.)

-- II --

Before going on to examine how the author of Hebrews presents the sacrifice of the Son, we should look at a handful of passages which could be said to constitute cryptic references to incidents portrayed in the Gospels. Commentators, in a show of enthusiasm over this, often pronounce Hebrews to be the epistle which “most displays an interest in the historical Jesus.” In fact, these few references can be shown to be based on readings of scripture and can be placed within the mythological world to which 10:5 points. In the process, we will also look at a couple of Gospel features which are notably conspicuous by their absence.

Outside the Compound

The first to consider is 13:11-13:

¹¹Those animals whose blood is brought as a sin-offering by the High Priest into the sanctuary have their bodies burnt outside the camp, ¹²and therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood. ¹³Let us then go to meet him outside the camp, bearing the stigma that he bore.

The first thing to note is that the name of Jerusalem is not used. Only the Gospel story would lead us to identify the author's thought about a gate with that city. Nor does the name of Calvary or Golgotha ever appear.

Note, too, that the flanking verses above use the word "camp." Here we need to look at the Greek word "*parembole*." It means a fortified military camp, and it is used in Exodus and Leviticus to refer to the Israelite camp in the wilderness of Sinai. Hebrews, in its presentation of the cultic rituals of sacrifice, seems to have this ancient 'historical' setting in mind rather than any contemporary Herodian Temple. The present passage, then, lies far from the site of Jerusalem in the writer's mind; and all of it has the mark of symbolic significance. Jesus suffering "outside the gate" is an element which is dependent, not on some historical record, but on the idea in the previous phrase. Jesus did this *because* bodies of sacrificed animals were burned outside the camp.

For this writer, everything to do with Christ and his sacrifice must be modeled on the sacrificial cultus of the Jewish religion, as described in scripture. Scripture determines the picture he creates of Christ and his activities in the spiritual world, and if animals were sacrificed outside the boundaries of the camp at Sinai, then Jesus had to undergo the same thing, in a higher world mythic parallel to the earthly copy. The idea of "outside the gate" also provides a symbolic parallel to the experiences of the believers, as we see by the succeeding verse which suggests that the author saw both Jesus and his own sect as rejected outsiders, living 'beyond the pale' with no permanent home. This is suggestive of the paradigmatic relationship between earthly and heavenly counterparts, as outlined in Article No. 8. Thus we can discount any necessary reference in this passage to Jerusalem or an historical event.

In any case, we have strong indication from an earlier passage (7:1-3) that the writer of Hebrews possesses no concept of Jesus ever having been in or near Jerusalem. Jesus in his role as heavenly High Priest finds his archetype, his scriptural precedent, in Melchizedek. This figure was "king of Salem and priest of God Most High," who is mentioned briefly in Genesis 14:18-20. (There is an even briefer reference to him in Psalm 110:4.) In comparing Melchizedek to Jesus, the writer is anxious to milk everything he can from this shadowy character; one who serves the role of prototype for Jesus the new High Priest. And yet he fails to make the obvious point that Melchizedek had officiated in the same city where Jesus later performed his own act as High Priest, the sacrifice of himself. This is only one of many unthinkable omissions in this epistle.

"In the Days of His Flesh"

In the last Supplementary Article (No. 8) I described how the philosophy of the period regarded the upper spiritual portion of the universe as containing the primary and ideal counterparts of material world things, giving savior gods like Christ features which sound like human attributes. Not only could the Lord be "sprung from Judah" (Hebrews 7:14) because scripture indicated that this would be the Messiah's lineage (see the discussion in *Sprung From Judah* in Article No. 8,

Christ As "Man"), but he could also be said to possess the *likeness* of "flesh" and "blood" and to undergo sacrifice. Says 2:14: "Since (Christ's children) have blood and flesh, he too shared the same things *in a like manner* (the Greek word means "similar, near to," not "identical"), so that through death he might break the power of him who had death at his command." This is a classic expression of the parallel between the higher world paradigm and the believers linked to him on earth.

If "flesh" could refer to the lower celestial regions, or more generally to the counterpart spirit world of myth where all the activities of savior gods and goddesses took place, then Hebrews 5:7 can readily be placed in such a context:

In the days of his flesh (en tais hemerais tes sarkos autou) he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to God who was able to deliver him from death (literally, out of death). Because of his humble submission his prayer was heard.

Scholars regularly claim that this passage is a reference to an incident in the earthly life of Jesus, namely the Passion scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. But is it? Some recognize the problems in such an interpretation. At Gethsemane, Jesus' anguished plea that the cup of suffering should pass him by was in fact not answered by God, which contradicts the point the writer wishes to make. From 4:14 on, he is anxious to show that Jesus is qualified to be High Priest for human beings, and one of his tasks, like the earthly high priest, is to petition God on their behalf. The reference in 5:7 is designed to show that on the latter score Jesus has already proven himself. For "in the days of his flesh" his prayers to God on his own behalf were answered. Not that the writer of Hebrews envisions his Jesus as having successfully avoided death through prayers to God for such a thing; those prayers were rather that Jesus be delivered out of death (that is, brought up from it: see below) and that he be perfected through suffering and obedience in order to serve as the source of humanity's salvation (cf. 2:10). And in fact, says the writer, this request was granted.

Any tradition about Jesus at Gethsemane which bore a resemblance to the Gospel account would not fit Hebrews' idea here, for the Gospel Jesus had prayed, in a moment of human weakness, that the cup be removed. This writer would never want to suggest that such a prayer was in any way answered, or was even a worthy one, much less that it made Jesus qualified to be the ideal High Priest. Scholars who squarely face this discrepancy usually downplay the link to Gethsemane. This does not include Montefiore (*op.cit.*, p.97) who declares that "this historical incident evidently made a deep impression upon the author." So deep, that he can only refer to it cryptically, making no connection to a specific moment in Jesus' earthly life. (What would have prevented him from actually saying "in the Gethsemane garden"?) And he misapplies it to the point he is making.

Where then did the idea in 5:7 come from? In the case of this epistle, we know the answer by now: from scripture. G. A. Buchanan (Anchor Bible, *Hebrews*, p.98) suggests that "offering up petitions" is drawn from Psalm 116:1, which uses the same words (in the Septuagint version). And Montefiore, while fussing over the fact that it does not appear in the Gospel description, sees the phrase "loud cries and tears" as an enlargement on Psalm 22:24: "when I cried to him, he heard me" (again in the wording of the Septuagint). Reflecting scholarship in general, Ellingworth (*op.cit.*, p.285) admits that 5:7 represents "a generalized use of the language and pattern of Old Testament intercession." He allows that the words do not refer to Gethsemane—though he considers that they must refer to *some* historical event.

It is clear that the picture of Jesus' "days in flesh" is being built up through the course of the first century from passages in scripture which supposedly supply details of those activities. For early

writers like that of Hebrews, such activities were mythical ones, taking place in the spiritual world of true reality. This ‘supernatural incarnation’ (using Pfleiderer’s phrase) is characterized almost universally in early Christian writers by the word “flesh” (*sarx*) in some form or other (*kata sarka, en sarki*, etc.). When it came time to envision the Christ as having entered the flesh of the material world, the step was a simple one. (It may have been one small step for a god, but it was a giant leap for Western mankind.)

Gone Missing: The Last Supper . . .

But these few gleanings from Hebrews which scholars have attempted to link to incidents contained in the Gospels are overshadowed by two startling voids in the thought of this writer. Commentaries never lack for expressions of astonishment and a scramble for explanation on the subject of the Eucharist and the Resurrection, both of which are missing in this epistle. The former at least, should be a centerpiece.

The core of Hebrews’ attention is focused on the concept of sacrifice. The Jewish sacrificial cult as expressed in the ritual of the Day of Atonement and at the inauguration of the old Mosaic covenant is set against the sacrifice offered up by the new High Priest Jesus which has established a new and superseding covenant. In the Gospels, Jesus’ act of institution at the Last Supper places a sacramental significance on the atoning sacrifice he is about to undergo, and is presented by Jesus himself as the establishment of a new covenant. If such a thing had existed within the tradition of the author of Hebrews, there are few statements in the entire field of New Testament research which could be made with more confidence than that he would not have failed to bring in Jesus’ establishment of the Eucharist for the closest examination.

And yet we read in chapter 9 (15-22):

And therefore he (Christ) is the mediator of a new covenant . . . to bring deliverance from sins . . . The former covenant itself was not inaugurated without blood. For when Moses had recited all the commandments to the people, he took the blood of the calves . . . saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you.” . . . And without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

This passage cries out for a detailed comparison with the establishment of the Christian Eucharist at the Last Supper. There Jesus inaugurated the new covenant as Moses had the old; the words of Jesus (e.g., Mk. 14:24: “This is my blood of the covenant, shed for many”) were spoken in parallel to Moses’ own; Jesus’ blood was shed “for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26:28), the same purpose for which the Law of the old covenant had required the shedding of blood. Can there be any feasible explanation for why the author of Hebrews would ignore the entire tradition of Jesus’ establishment of the Eucharist with all these important features—other than the inescapable conclusion that he could have known of no such thing?

Again, there’s a clincher. It was pointed out above that the writer is eager to take as much as he can from the meager data available in Genesis and Psalm 110 about the figure of Melchizedek, king and priest of Jerusalem in the time of Abraham. But there is more than the one omission described earlier in his use of Genesis 14:18-20. Verse 18 begins:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought food and wine . . .

A writer whose main occupation is making parallels between his own brand of Christian theology and its embodiment in the sacred scriptures, fails to point to Melchizedek’s “food and

wine” as a prefiguring of the bread and cup of the eucharistic sacrament established by Jesus! Another unthinkable omission.

How do scholars deal with Hebrews’ stunning silence on the Eucharist? Most of them seize on the observation that the author, when quoting Moses in chapter 9, has made a “subtle change” of one of the words from Exodus 24:8, substituting another which appears in Mark’s account of Jesus’ words at the Supper. (Instead of “Behold the blood . . .” he writes: “This is the blood . . .”) This ‘change’ is supposed to indicate that the author knew of the Supper scene and had Jesus’ words in mind, if only subconsciously. He can have them sufficiently in mind to alter a word, but not sufficiently to give us any discussion of the very act and sayings of Christ which lie at the core of his new covenant theology. Montefiore notes (*op.cit.*, p.158) that the author of Hebrews “is not concerned in this epistle with the Christian Eucharist,” which hardly explains the matter nor alleviates the perplexity of it.

Few other features of the documentary record so clearly reveal the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of the early Christian movement. Hebrews provides strong evidence that independent expressions of belief in the existence of a divine Son and his role in salvation were to be found all over the landscape of the first century, with no central source or authority and little common sharing of doctrine and ritual. Just where the community which produced Hebrews was located, or the year in which this unique document was written, is impossible to tell, but that it owed its genesis to any historical events in Jerusalem, or anywhere else, is very difficult to support.

. . . and the Empty Tomb

The second of those startling voids in Hebrews is the absence of any concept of a resurrection for Christ, either in flesh or for a period on earth. Héring, in addition to labeling the epistle an “enigma” on this account, observes (*op.cit.*, p.xi) that the writer seems to have no regard for the Easter miracle, since “events unroll as though Jesus went up to heaven immediately after death,” an idea found in more than one early Christian document. After “enduring the cross” (a reference which can easily fit into the mythical setting, as discussed above), Jesus takes his seat at the right hand of the throne of God (12:2). A similar process is described in 10:12: “But Christ offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat at the right hand of God.” This mimics the sequence in 1:3 as well, noted above. Finally, in 13:20, in a passage which has in any case been questioned as authentic to the original epistle, the writer speaks a prayer which begins: “May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep . . .” Here the Greek verb is “*anago*,” meaning to “lead up,” not the usual word applied in other New Testament passages to the idea of resurrection. Not surprisingly, the whole phrase is modeled on an Old Testament passage, Isaiah 63:11 (Septuagint): “Where is he that brought up from the sea the shepherd of the sheep?” Once again, we see that ideas about Jesus and his activities are derived not from history, but from scripture.

W. D. Davies (*Hebrews*, p.137) would like to suggest that “brought up” includes within itself the idea of both resurrection and ascension (including the standard 40-day interim, no doubt), which is yet another case of solving a problem by letting a silence stand for the very thing which is not in evidence. But it is difficult to believe that this writer could have had any concept that Jesus had overcome death in some way which would be meaningful to human hopes. In 7:16, the author extols Jesus as one who owes his priesthood “to the power of a life that cannot be destroyed.” Is this founded on Jesus’ conquest of death through his resurrection from the tomb? No such idea is hinted at. Instead, the statement is based—once again—on an interpretation of a scriptural passage, the one in Psalm 110 which declares: “thou art a priest forever.”

James Moffat, in his study of Hebrews (*International Critical Commentary, Hebrews*, p.xxxviii), would have us believe that the author could not make use of the idea of Jesus' resurrection because he was confining his High Priest analogy to the biblical prototype of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, and there was no 'slot' for it! Can we believe that *any* literary consideration would lead a Christian writer to reject the rising of Jesus from his tomb as 'unusable' and ignore it for 13 chapters?

-- III --

A High Priest in a Heavenly Sanctuary

The picture of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews is unlike any other in the New Testament. Scholars have often asked themselves what led its author to even think of portraying Jesus in this manner, as the heavenly High Priest whose blood sacrifice, offered in the heavenly sanctuary, is the higher world counterpart of the Day of Atonement sacrifice performed by the high priest in the sanctuary on earth. It is the more perfect embodiment of the earthly cult, and it has established a new covenant which ushers in the final age.

Nor is this writer some isolated theologian, for behind him (as we can see from the epistle) lies some form of community whose views he is representing and to whom he is addressing himself. Of course, scholars ask this question within the context of orthodox assumptions. They ask what led such a group to deviate so radically and with such "fresh creative thinking" (Montefiore, *op.cit.*, p.96) from what must have been the more standard Christian message about Jesus, from the theological and historical picture they must have received through the apostolic channels by which they were converted. Cast in this way, the question is indeed a challenging and perplexing one.

But in the epistle itself no sign of such a deviation can be detected. Such a question is never addressed. The writer and his community seem to move in their own world, a world exclusively dependent on scripture and its interpretation. The handful of seeming allusions to some "earthly" experience of their divine Christ are, as we have just seen, ambiguous and cryptic, and can more easily be explained as proceeding from scripture than from any traditions of an historical Jesus of Nazareth, a figure who is never explicitly mentioned.

As noted above, Hebrews provides perhaps the best example in the New Testament of how Christ belief arose spontaneously out of currents and trends of the day, in independent expressions, each taking on its own characteristics as a result of the local conditions and the people involved. The epistle is what it is because a distinct group formulated their own picture of spiritual realities. They searched scripture for information and insight about the Son of God, under the influence of the wider religious and philosophical atmosphere of the first century, especially Alexandrian Platonism, and this is what they came up with. Their mediator between heaven and earth has been cast in the mold of the Jewish sacrificial cult. But they are not reinterpreting an apostolic message, they are not giving an against-the-grain twist (for reasons which would be difficult to explain) to the story of some recent man. No bow is made in the epistle to any wider Christian movement, nor to any standard from which they are deviating. The sectarian community represented by Hebrews is self-sufficient, and it too, like all other expressions of Christ belief of the day, from Paul to the enigmatic Johannine community, professes its dependence on, and defines its origins in, divine revelation and the sacred writings. Nothing else is in evidence.

It is illuminating that Montefiore, in trying to answer the question of why the writer of Hebrews interpreted Jesus in his own peculiar way, instinctively draws on Gospel details. He points

(*op.cit.*, p.95f) to Jesus' words about his sacrificial death, his saying about building a temple not made with hands, the high priestly prayer quoted in John 17. But why is this natural instinct of the post-Gospel Christian exegete not mirrored in the document itself? In Hebrews, there *are* no sayings of Jesus quoted; there *are* no events of his life as recorded in the Gospels which the writer draws on to explain his interpretation of Jesus as High Priest. Not even the central concept of Jesus' sacrifice as the establishment of a new covenant has been illuminated by the slightest reference to the Last Supper or to the words Jesus is said to have spoken on that occasion inaugurating such a covenant. Montefiore has only succeeded in highlighting the perplexing, maddening silence of it all.

A Blood Offering

To examine the mythical world of Hebrews, we will jump into the very middle of the epistle and the center of the writer's thought: the sacrifice of Christ in the heavenly realm as laid out in chapters 8 and 9. The structure of this thought is thoroughly Platonic, though it mirrors some longstanding Jewish ideas as well. I will quote Marcus Dods from his 1910 commentary on Hebrews in the *Expositor's Greek Testament* (p.271), for he lays out the Platonic principle very succinctly:

"(The author's focus on the 'heavenly' represents) the contrast of this world and heaven, between that of the merely material and transient, and the ideal and abiding. Things of this world are material, unreal, transient; those of heaven are ideal, true, eternal. Heaven is the world of realities, of things themselves, of which the things here are but copies."

One side of this Platonic duality is the earthly sacrificial cult of the Temple, performed by the priests. Strictly speaking, the author presents it in its pre-Temple setting, when the early priestly ministry was conducted in a movable tent complex during the wanderings in the wilderness (or so legend had it). This places him directly in the world of the scriptures, in the company of Moses at the time of the Exodus. The day-to-day offerings and sacrifices take place in the outer tent, but once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest passes through the curtain which closes off the inner tent, the Most Holy Place or sanctuary where stands the ark of the covenant (9:4). On this day, the high priest enters the sanctuary with the blood of special sacrifices "which he offers on his own behalf and for the people's sins of ignorance" (9:7).

Here is the earthly, transient manifestation: a material sanctuary involving goat and bull sacrifices of limited efficacy, part of an old covenant which has proven itself faulty (8:8). And what is the other side of the Platonic equation? This is "the real sanctuary, the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man" (8:2). The tent of Christ's priesthood "is a greater and more perfect one, not made by men's hands, not part of the created world" (9:11). In other words, it lies in the upper world of the real and eternal.

Here, despite attempts to claim the contrary, there can be no denying that Hebrews' thought world is fundamentally Platonic. This is a divided, dualistic universe of realms heavenly and earthly, genuine and imitation. Christ enters "not that sanctuary made by men's hands which is only a symbol of the reality, but heaven itself" (9:24). In classic fashion, the upper world contains the "archetype," the lower world the "antitype" or copy.

Christ as heavenly High Priest is infinitely superior to the high priest on earth who officiates in the earthly tabernacle. The blood of the sacrifice Christ offers is his own blood, so much greater in power than the material blood of animals that it has "secured an eternal deliverance" (9:12), a forgiveness of sins which the earthly sacrifices could never achieve.

But the writer of Hebrews should be facing a huge problem. As a way of getting into this, let's start by examining a preliminary question which scholars seem not quite sure how to answer. What specifically constitutes the "sacrifice" which Christ offers, and where has it taken place? The 'event' which the writer constantly focuses on seems not to be Christ's death itself, but his action of entering the heavenly sanctuary and offering his blood to God. This is the redemptive action, the offering of himself. Obviously, the writer sees things this way because his Platonic philosophy requires a parallel to the earthly cult; in the tent on earth, it is the entry into the inner tabernacle and the offering there of the blood of the sacrificed animal which is the determining element of the Day of Atonement rite, not the slaughter outside which produced the blood. Thus the center of gravity in Hebrews is the entry of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary, bringing his own blood as an offering to God. This is what the writer seems to define as the act and location of the "sacrifice."

Such an image has caused more than one commentator discomfort, for it is faintly distasteful, they have noted, to envision Jesus going from Calvary to heaven with his own blood in tow, and anyway what had he done with it during the three days in the tomb? (Remember that Hebrews is canonical and must therefore represent some kind of divine truth.) Montefiore also fusses over the point that Jesus shed very little blood on the cross, apart from the nails to his hands and feet!

Unfortunately for our understanding of things, all the writer ever refers to is this entry of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary. He never refers to Calvary, to Jesus' historical death, as part of the redeeming action. He never itemizes the death as a distinct feature of the sacrifice. (The passing reference to "the cross" in 12:2 is not in any context of location, sacrifice, redemption or history.) And yet, the actual "shedding of blood" is a part of things, for 9:22 says that without it "there is no forgiveness." So it would seem he regards the death of Jesus (wherever it took place) as part of the heavenly sacrifice, though not part of the most important action inside the sanctuary itself. *Heavenly*, because this sacrifice is "spiritual, eternal and unblemished" (9:14). Earthly sacrifices cleanse earthly copies, but "better sacrifices are required to cleanse heavenly things" (9:23). In the Platonic thinking of the writer such sacrifices, such blood, can only be spiritual and eternal.

And yet, *there* should be his problem. Jesus' blood was neither. He had lived on earth, he had been human in his incarnation, and human blood, the blood of matter, coursed in his veins. It was shed on a hill on earth, material, red and sticky. The sacrifice—or at least an essential part of it, a part which the tradition he supposedly received would certainly have regarded as essential—took place in the earthly realm, in the world of the transient, unreal copy of the heavenly. But such an earthly dimension would shatter his Platonic comparison. It would irreparably contaminate the purity of the earth / heaven, high priest / High Priest contrast on which his whole theology is based. The sacrifice had not been confined to the heavenly realm. It had a foot in both camps, and thus to some extent the writer would be comparing an earthly thing with another earthly thing.

At the very least, *he would have had to address this anomaly*. He would have had to explain why "human" blood shed on earth could at the same time be spiritual and cleanse the heavenly sanctuary (9:23). He would have had to justify why, when every Christian circle around him (presumably) thought of Christ's sacrifice in terms of its occurrence on Calvary, he has ignored such a venue and placed it in heaven. He would have had to qualify his Platonic picture.

Of course, he does not. He shows no sign of being perturbed by any conflict in his theoretical universe. Instead, the picture is uniform because the author has extrapolated earthly figures and activities (the Jewish sacrificial cultus) into a heavenly embodiment which is the perfect archetype of the lower world copy. And he has supported it by a Platonic reading of scripture,

which he regards as a picture of the higher world of true realities where Christ operates. There is no historical Jesus, no sacrifice on an earthly Calvary, lurking in the background to disturb this finely drawn duality.

Problematic Solutions

It is astonishing that so few scholars show any awareness of the above conundrum, even as they recognize the spiritual, Platonic nature of Hebrews' thought world. Moffat can say (*International Critical Commentary, Hebrews*, p.xlii): "For the complete sacrifice has been offered in the realm of the spirit." He remarks on 9:14 (p.xliii) that the sacrifice of Christ "had been offered in the spirit and—as we might say—in the eternal order of things . . . it belonged essentially to the higher order of absolute reality." Dods, analyzing the same passage (*op.cit.*, p.332), declares that Christ's ministry has a greater efficacy because it has been "exercised in a more perfect tabernacle and with a truer sacrifice." In other words, they recognize Jesus' sacrifice as an event which in some way takes place in the world of Platonic-type myth, in the higher world of the spirit. Nor is any of this declared to be metaphorical.

A few more recent scholars have played down the Platonic nature of the writer's thought (such as Ellingworth in the *New International Greek Testament*), no doubt sensing the problem it creates. But that a document which inhabits an Alexandrian-style milieu would nevertheless not embody the fundamental principles of Middle Platonism is impossible. Older scholars such as Dods and Moffat had no such doubts.

Such observations as Moffat's do the mythicists' work for them. They show that it is possible even for orthodox scholars to recognize the mythical realm and to envision the sacrifice of Christ within it. Of course, there is the inevitable attempt to compromise, to introduce an historical Jesus into the Platonic equation. Here is some of what Moffat has to say (p.xliii):

"The writer breathed the Philonic atmosphere (of Middle Platonism) in which the eternal Now overshadowed the things of space and time, but he knew this sacrifice had taken place on the cross, and his problem was one which never confronted Philo, the problem which we moderns have to face in the question: How can a single historical fact possess a timeless significance?"

Well, the writer of Hebrews never gives any indication that "he knew" of such an earthly sacrifice, nor that he faced a problem which Philo did not. Hebrews never asks or addresses Moffat's question, or other "problems" like it. He in fact follows directly on Philo's way of thinking, for Philo also referred to the Logos as High Priest, also envisioned the activities of this High Priest (though they were not sacrificial) as confined to the "intelligible world" of higher realities. The Epistle to the Hebrews inhabits the same conceptual universe, and if the writer had deviated so far from its spirit as to confer all this Platonic thinking on an historical, earthly man, he could not have failed to address such a radical innovation.

Nor does the writer of Hebrews support Buchanan's attempt (*op.cit.*, p.xxv) to get around the epistle's Platonic pattern. Buchanan declares that the relationship between heavenly prototypes and earthly antitypes is "understood in terms of historical sequence and faith that is foreign to Platonism." But the epistle itself shows no such understanding. It is true that in regular Jewish biblical exegesis, prototypes in scripture could be seen as anticipating later antitypes "that were also historical and earthly." But this is clearly not the course followed by this epistle, which focuses all its attention on the work of Christ in the heavenly world. It never bends its Platonic principles to accommodate an "historical sequence" or an earthly sacrifice. Once again a scholar,

under the influence of preconception, has chosen to read into a document ideas which are not presented by the document itself.

Montefiore (*op.cit.*, p.133f) goes so far as to say that the author intended no thought of a sacrifice in heaven at all. Rather, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary was simply one of intercession with God on humanity's behalf. All the talk of entering the sanctuary with his blood and offering it there is, as it were, metaphorical and refers back to Calvary where the actual sacrifice and offering had taken place. In discussing this point, Montefiore writes the word "Calvary" three times in the space of one page (134-5), yet he seems not to wonder how the writer could be presenting such a metaphorical meaning and not likewise be forced to refer to the scene of Jesus' death and the fact that it had taken place on earth. He also argues that blood could not be offered in heaven because "heaven is the sphere not of flesh and blood but of ultimate reality." But what is this ultimate reality if not the more perfect forms of the earthly copies? By letting his Gospel preconceptions govern his whole interpretation of the text, by dismissing any concept of spiritual blood—blood which could be carried into a heavenly sanctuary—Montefiore has castrated the epistle's thought and rendered meaningless the whole Platonic structure the author has carefully put together. He has left him comparing an earthly cult with an earthly sacrifice.

That sacrifices could be offered in heaven is also shown by the Testament of Levi, third part of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, a Jewish document (from probably a little earlier time) with certain amendments which scholars label "Christian." In chapter 3, sacrifices are depicted as being offered to God in a heavenly temple by angels of the third heaven. In this multi-layered universe, the third heaven contains an archetypal sanctuary whose copy is the earthly temple. Here the archangels "offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord in behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones" (as in the earthly rite on the Day of Atonement). "They present to the Lord a pleasing odor." Such sacrifices are declared to be "bloodless," although sacrifices in heaven involving blood are to be found in later Kabbalistic thinking.

Searching For Historical Events

Can we confidently maintain that for the writer of Hebrews Christ's sacrifice was in no way "a single historical fact," as Moffat puts it; something which had taken place on earth in his own time? Let's look at a few specific things the epistle says.

Just as Paul in Galatians 3 viewed the Law as a temporary measure until the coming of the present time of salvation through faith, the writer of Hebrews does something similar in 9:8-11. He sees the outer tent of the earthly sanctuary as symbolizing the old way, the old type of sacrifice. Throughout history, it has obscured the sight of the inner tent which symbolized the new way which was coming, the priesthood of Christ and his eternal sacrifice. Now this new way has been revealed—through the community's own reading of scripture and its conviction of inspiration. The outer, imperfect tent with its old, imperfect sacrifices has been removed, swept away. This idea, by the way, places the group which produced the epistle within a larger, diverse movement that rejected or aimed at reforming the Temple cult, a significant stream of thought within the wider Judaism of the first century. It is also an argument for placing the writing of the epistle before the destruction of the Temple, when such goals would have become moot.

How does the author describe the present time, when the new way has been revealed? He calls it a "time of reformation," of "amendment" (9:10), not the time of Christ's ministry or sacrifice. The entire epistle is concerned with God's revelation in scripture and the inaugurating of the new covenant. It began with the declaration that in this final age God has spoken to the world through the Son, but this is a Son, as we have seen, who speaks only in the sacred writings. In 9:11 the

author says that “Christ has come,” but is this a reference to his life on earth? Rather, the context indicates that he is referring to Christ’s “entry” into the new tent of his heavenly priesthood, the spiritual sanctuary. (Ellingworth supports this.) He stresses that this tent is “not of this created world,” (a point which Buchanan seems to have ignored). This Christian writer can speak of Christ’s “coming” and yet say not a word about any of his work on earth, only of what he did in heaven. Clearly, such a “coming” of Christ is entirely in terms of his spiritual world activities, as revealed in scripture. In the broader sense, it could also entail the thought of his coming to the believing community through the revelation about him, an idea found in other epistles as well.

In 9:15 the author speaks of the death of Christ, making the point that the new covenant, like all testaments, can only take effect after the testator’s death. But he does not specify when or where this death occurred. The actual death of Jesus remains a glimmer on the edges of the sacrifice. Its most significant mention comes in 2:9, where it characterizes Jesus as a heavenly paradigm: “crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death,” and “in tasting death he should stand for us all.” This passage is reminiscent of the christological hymn in Philippians, suggesting an entirely mythical setting.

A resurrection for Christ, as outlined above, rates scarcely a mention, and in any case plays no role in redemption. The idea of a resurrection in the Gospel sense is completely missing in this epistle.

A Sacrifice “Once For All”

In 9:24f, the writer speaks again of Christ’s entry into the heavenly sanctuary, and here he uses a favorite word, “once” (*hapax, ephapax*), a concept which he applies to Christ’s sacrifice (as also in 9:12). But what is it that has happened “once”? We need to look at the extended passage, a very revealing one (here slightly altered from the NEB):

*(24) For Christ has entered . . . heaven itself to appear [the verb *emphainizo*] now before God on our behalf. (25) Nor is he there to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the sanctuary year by year with blood not his own. (26a) If this were so, he would have needed to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. (26b) But as it is, he has appeared [the verb *phaneroo*] once for all (*hapax*) at the completion of the ages to abolish sin by his sacrifice.*

The most important thing to realize is that the act of “appearing” throughout these verses relates to one thing: Jesus’ sacrifice, which is synonymous with his entry into the heavenly sanctuary to make his offering to God. The “appearing” in verse 26b is not some sudden shift to a general reference to Christ’s birth or life on earth, something which is never even touched on when discussing the sacrifice. The “appearing to abolish sin” of this latter verse is in the same category as the “appearing before God” of the earlier verse 24. All of it takes place in heaven.

It is true that those two “appearings” do not use the same verb, but Ellingworth points out (*op.cit.*, p.480) that “there is no sharp distinction or contrast in Hebrews between *emphainizo* (verse 24) and *phaneroo* (verse 26b).” Some scholars (e.g., J. Swetnam, *Hebrews*, p.233) recognize that the idea of “appearing” in verse 26b is focused specifically on the sacrifice, and this, as we have seen, the author nowhere makes a point of locating on earth.

But what of that unusual feature, the use of the word *hapax* (“once”), which is a deviation from strict Platonic thinking? The author has defined this entry into the heavenly sanctuary, not in the way the later Sallustius regarded the myths of the savior gods, as something which “always is

so,” not something timeless and constant, but as a spiritual event of a singular nature, something done “once.” And he seems to locate this event in the present, “at the completion of the ages.”

Why does he do this? Perhaps most importantly, the “once” makes Jesus’ ministry superior to the sacrificial cult on earth, in which the high priest must renew the Day of Atonement sacrifice year after year; Christ, on the other hand, had only to perform it “once for all.” The writer’s theological needs, to establish the superiority and perfection of the heavenly side of the equation, may well have determined this aspect to his thinking.

He may also have tied the spiritual event of Christ’s sacrifice with the present time and regarded it as “once” because it is now and only now that the revelation about Christ and his sacrifice has been made. The event is spoken of as “occurring” at the time of its revelation, at the time when it takes effect. In fact, the choice of the verb *phaneroo*—a “revelation” word—in verse 26b may be influenced by this, reflecting the idea of the present-day manifestation of Christ to the world. This is further indicated by the use of the perfect tense which focuses on present effects rather than on an historical happening.

But we can go further. That the writer does not have any earthly event in mind in this entire passage is indicated by a verse coming shortly after the 9:24-26 quoted above. 28a is a virtual restatement of 26b: “So Christ was offered once to remove men’s sins. . .”

This removal or abolition of sin, spotlighted in both 26b and 28a, is tied in the former to the act of sacrifice and in the latter to the act of offering. But these are synonymous, for the act of offering *is* the act of sacrifice. And this act, as we have seen, is always presented as the entry of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary carrying his sacrificial blood. Thus the reference to “appearing” at the completion of the ages (in 26b) is a reference to the *heavenly* event. Nowhere is anything earthly in view.

Other passages, such as 7:27 and 10:10, also associate the “once for all” idea with the act of “offering” which is located in the heavenly realm. The epistle consistently portrays a spiritual act taking place in the spiritual world. We can conclude, therefore, that no earthly life or event is implied by anything the writer says, and that the Epistle to the Hebrews knows of no historical Jesus.

Standing on Mount Zion

Such a conclusion is clinched by the epistle’s climax in chapter 12, a final peroration in which the writer urges steadfastness on his readers and gives dire warning against apostasy. “Remember where you stand!” he cries (12:18), first calling to their minds the scene of the granting of the old covenant, before the blazing fire of Mount Sinai where a cowering Moses heard the oracular voice of God. When he turns to the scene of the new covenant, where does he place his readers’ vision? Are they invited to stand upon the mount of Calvary? Beneath the cross where Jesus of Nazareth hangs? Perhaps in front of the empty tomb? No, where Mt. Sinai symbolized the old covenant, it is Mt. Zion—still a scriptural motif—which for this writer symbolizes the new.

On Mt. Zion, before the heavenly Jerusalem, the scene is one of angels, God the judge of all, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. But when the writer enjoins his readers (v.25) to “see that you do not refuse to hear the voice that speaks,” we hear no voice of Jesus. Instead it is God himself who speaks, through one of his scriptural prophets. How is it possible, in providing a new-covenant counterpart to the voice of Moses and the divine oracles on Sinai, that a Christian writer would *not* offer the voice of Jesus: the Son of God himself when recently on earth,

teaching, enlightening, admonishing, bringing a new Law, even speaking from the cross? In the Gospels, the concept of understanding and heeding the things which Jesus spoke is a major theme. The phrase on Jesus' lips, "He who hears my words," is a recurring motif.

Scholars should *weep* before the total ignorance, the complete disinterest, indeed the sheer disdain which writers like that of Hebrews seem to show toward the voice and persona of Jesus of Nazareth. How likely is it that a Jewish-Christian writer, presumably converted by a response to the figure of this human Jesus into a faith which his whole heritage would have regarded as blasphemous, how likely is it that he would choose to ignore the entire earthly record of this very figure? What personal disposition would lead him to exclude from his presentation all the motifs of his new faith, to draw inspiration and illustration from ancient writings which were only a prophecy of the real thing? Why, for virtually all the first century Christian letter writers, was it dusty passages from the Prophets and Psalmists which inspired their christologies, their eloquence, their poetic imagery, and not the vibrant words and images of the recent incarnation of the Son of God which should have been hanging in the very air of their daily lives?

No string of unlikely argumentation such as scholarship regularly indulges in can be judged adequate in the face of the overall stultifying silence on Jesus of Nazareth found in the New Testament epistles, no defense even distantly sufficient for the utter void in the early Christian writings which should be filled by the Gospel Jesus. The argument from silence—a silence as pervasive and as irrational as this one is—must be considered fully vindicated.

Epilogue: A Pair of Smoking Guns

But there are two passages in Hebrews which spell out for us the fact that this writer knows of no Jesus of Nazareth, no Son incarnated to earth. One involves an ancient scriptural prophecy, the other a feature of the comparison between heavenly and earthly activities of the old and new priesthoods.

A First or Second Coming?

The great Day of the Lord in Jewish prophecy and expectation was turned by certain early Christian preaching into the coming of Jesus, the spiritual Christ. (But not all: some epistles, such as James and 1 John, as well as the Didache, retain the idea of the arrival of God himself, with no sense of a Parousia of Christ.)

But it is the Epistle to the Hebrews which contains the most fascinating passage on this subject. 10:37 reads:

For soon, very soon (in the words of Scripture), "he who is to come [ho erchomenos] will come and will not delay." (NEB)

This is from the Septuagint version of Habakkuk 2:3. The prophet was referring to God himself, but by the beginning of the Christian period, this was one of many biblical passages that were being reinterpreted as referring to the Messiah. The Greek participle *erchomenos*, which the Septuagint here uses, became a virtual title, used with a masculine article: "*the* Coming One," and referred to the expected savior figure who would arrive at the End-time. This is clearly how Hebrews is using it.

But stop and think a moment. The writer is affirming his belief that “the Coming One will come, and soon,” for so the prophet has promised. Is he referring to the Gospel Jesus and his supposed Second Coming in glory? It is certainly the coming in glory at the End-time that he has in mind, but how can this be a *second* coming, for the writer has made no room for a previous one. If the prophet had prophesied Christ’s coming, this would have been earlier fulfilled in his incarnation, when he came to earth as Jesus of Nazareth. This in fact is how Christians later interpreted all those prophetic passages about the Messiah: they referred to Christ’s life on earth. But the writer of Hebrews makes no allowance for such a thing. Even if he wishes to apply Habakkuk’s words to the Parousia of Jesus instead of the incarnation, he needs at least to make some reference to that earlier coming, if only to avoid confusion. Yet he does not. His silence plainly shows that for him Christ’s coming is still to be, that he has no concept of him already having been here. As 10:37 expresses itself, the scriptural promise of Christ’s arrival has not yet been fulfilled.

But there are those who will protest, pointing to an earlier passage. Here is how the NEB translates Hebrews 9:27-28:

(27) And as it is the lot of men to die once, and after death comes judgment, (28) so Christ was offered once to bear the burden of men’s sins, and will appear [literally, he will be seen, or will reveal himself] a second time [ek deuterou], sin done away, to bring salvation to those who are watching for him.

Scholars claim that here at least—and they are willing to allow that it is *only* here in the entire corpus of New Testament epistles—a Christian writer clearly refers to the End-time coming of Jesus, the Parousia, as a *second* coming. But is there such a reference even here?

The above analysis of 10:37 would suggest there is not. But we can contest it on the basis of 9:27-28 alone. If the “*ek deuterou*” means a second time, the parallel with verse 27 is destroyed. Verse 27 is saying that “first men die, and after that (or ‘next’) they are judged.” There is no sense here of a “second time” for anything; the writer is simply offering us a sequence of events: death, followed by judgment. Does this not imply that verse 28 is offering a sequence as well? “Christ was offered once, and after that (next) he will appear to bring salvation.”

The idea of appearing “a second time” would be intrusive here. Since the writer is clearly presenting his readers with some kind of parallel between verses 27 and 28 (note also the “once” in both parts), it seems unlikely he would introduce an element which doesn’t fit the parallel, especially one he doesn’t need. “*Ek deuterou*” can have the alternate meaning of “secondly” or “next in sequence,” like the similar word *deuteron*, which appears in this sense in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Just as men’s death is followed by judgment, so is Christ’s sacrifice followed by his appearance, but with no indication of how long a time between the two. Before the turn of the century, Vaughan (quoted in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol.4, p.340) translated verse 28 this way: “Christ died once and the next thing before him is the Advent.” Thus even in Hebrews it would seem that we have no Second Coming of Christ.

No Footstep Heard

Finally, there is a startling statement made in chapter 8, one which most commentators manage to gloss over or ignore completely. The writer is speaking of Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and begins to compare him to the earthly high priest. At verse 4, he says:

Now, if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest . . .

No matter how one tries to detect a feasible qualification to this phrase, there is no denying that the writer seems to be saying that Jesus was never on earth. The Greek is “*ei men oun en epi ges*,” which is literally: “Now, if accordingly he were on earth . . .” The verb *en* is the imperfect, which is strictly speaking a past tense, and the NEB (above) chooses to reflect this. But the meaning within the context is probably present, or at least temporally ambiguous, much like the conditional sense in which most other translations render it: “Now if he were on earth (meaning at this time), he would not be a priest.”

However, the writer has qualified this statement in no way whatever. He does not say, if he were *now* on earth (instead of earlier), if he returned to earth, if he were still on earth; not even: “While he was on earth, he was not a priest . . .” The writer says nothing which shows any cognizance of the fact that Jesus *had* been on earth, recently, that it was on earth where an important part of his sacrifice, the shedding of his blood, had occurred. (In contrast to scholars, who regularly feel constrained to point this out.)

The point he is making in this verse is that Jesus on earth would have nothing to do, since there are already earthly priests performing the duties which the Law prescribes, and they do so “in a sanctuary which is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly” (8:5). Yet how could any writer say that Jesus would have nothing to do on earth when he did, in fact, have so much to do? How could he imply that earth is the scene only of human duties in a human sanctuary when here was where Jesus had performed his sacrifice, shed his blood—on a hill called Calvary outside Jerusalem? Surely no writer could express himself this way without at least a qualification, something which would give a nod to Jesus’ recent presence in the physical arena. (Of course, such a life and death on earth, as noted earlier, would have thrown a monkeywrench into his carefully crafted Platonic picture.)

Ellingworth has glimpsed the edge of the abyss, and hastily drawn back. In analyzing this passage (*op cit.*, p.405), he questions the normal interpretation of the imperfect *en*, and with it the NEB translation (which he admits “is grammatically possible”), because it “could be misunderstood as meaning that Jesus had never ‘been on earth’.” He claims that this “goes against the context”—which is to say the common assumption over the last 19 centuries that an historical Jesus existed, one who had in fact been on earth. In the face of the overwhelming evidence which Hebrews alone provides, it is time to question that very assumption, rather than try to reject the natural meaning of an innocent verb.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever,” the author intones in 13:8. Could a divine Son, pre-existent in heaven before his incarnation, who was born fully human in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the Great, who grew up and ministered in Galilee, was slain in Jerusalem and rose bodily from the dead to return to heaven—could he be spoken of in this fashion? But of a mythical Christ who operated entirely in the spiritual sphere, in a timeless, Platonic existence, one who had never been to earth and was known only by divine revelation from the pages of scripture, such an affirmation would be perfectly apt.

Josephus Unbound **Reopening the Josephus Question**

I: Preamble

Contrasting Worlds

In an alternate universe to this one, scholars investigating Christianity's origins are a happy lot. There, the man whom 2000 years of Christian tradition places at the genesis of the movement enjoys ample attestation. There, the five canonical Gospels may be filled with much legendary and theological accretion, and the indefatigable Paulus may have been guilty of bringing too much hellenistic hocus-pocus to his interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth, but the assortment of Christian correspondence preserved from the movement's first century is filled with teachings attributed to the beloved Master, with cherished memories of the events of his life and death. There, letters written by early believers speak of reverent visits to the site of Jesus' redeeming sacrifice, of pilgrimages to the tomb where he rose from the dead, even if these had to be carried out in clandestine fashion.

In that alternate world, early Christian letter writers also have the occasional word to say about the Roman governor who was responsible for their Lord's crucifixion, about the privileged and respected Jewish mother of their incarnated Son of God, about the ascetic prophet who had preceded him and even baptized him, so tradition had it. And the relations between those many apostles of the Christ, who discuss and argue and vilify across the pages of the early Christian epistles, are characterized by regular claims and counterclaims about the authority Jesus had bestowed upon them while on earth, or the channels through which they could trace their credentials and their doctrines back to the man himself who had set everything in motion.

When scholars in that alternate universe step outside the writings of the Christian movement itself, they find that widespread notice was taken of the new faith and its founder by the contemporary world. The Alexandrian philosopher Philo had mentioned his death under Pilate in speaking of the Roman governor's reprehensible career in Judea. Pliny the Elder, who collected all manner of natural and unnatural phenomena associated with famous figures and sects, had recorded certain traditions—probably apocryphal, but no matter—about astronomical portents which Christians said had accompanied their founder's birth, as well as an amazing reaction of nature reputed to have taken place at the time of his death. This chronicler's nephew, Pliny the Younger, had related Christian tales about the man and his exploits in his letter to the emperor. And other assorted commentators of the time had given passing mention or even a few valuable details about the man of Nazareth and the impact he had made, both among his many followers and throughout contemporary society as the new sect spread and made its presence felt.

Even in that contented place, however, there is the occasional sticking point. The works of the foremost Jewish historian of the time, Flavius Josephus, happen to contain two references to things Christian which are in dispute, since one as it stands is obviously a Christian composition, and the other possesses certain problematic aspects. Scholars there are faced with the question of whether in fact this particular historian did record anything about the Christian movement and its founder, or perhaps was even unfamiliar with him, though this they regard as unlikely in view of the clear and widespread witness given to Jesus in many other contemporary records. Word has it that one scholar in that alternate world went so far as to raise the possibility that, in view of the uncertainty in the Josephan record, the founder of Christianity may not have existed, but he was

promptly carted off to an institution where they have effective treatments for such delusionary manifestations.

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In a different universe to that one, scholars are not so fortunate, or so happy. There, the canonical Gospels are also seen as possessing questionable historical reliability, built as they are on midrashic principles which seem to draw entirely on scriptural precedent. In that world, however, scholars cannot turn to the early Christian record outside the Gospels for information on Jesus of Nazareth, for strangely enough it contains virtually nothing about the reputed human founder of Christianity. In the New Testament epistles they can discover no attribution of earthly teachings to him, no miracle working, no details of his life and death. The places of his career are never mentioned, let alone visited; the figures populating the Gospel story seem unknown. Rival apostles of the Christ preach and debate and express themselves without any appeal to an earthly Jesus, and speak of the beginning of their movement and their knowledge of the Son of God they worship in terms of revelation and inspiration from scripture, with God himself as the source of their ethic and impulse. Their Christ is a cosmic redeemer unlinked to a recent historical man, one who bears uncanny resemblance to a raft of mythical savior gods of the time. Within the non-Christian record, the silence on any human founder of Christianity echoes forlornly for almost the first hundred years of the movement.

With one exception. In that world too, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus exhibits two contentious passages referring to a human Jesus. One is a Christian composition as it now stands, and the other is problematic in certain respects. Did this Flavius Josephus really record anything about the Christian founder? Was he perhaps unfamiliar with him? The difference between this universe and the other one is that here much more hangs in the balance. For in the absence of any other supporting evidence from the first century that in fact the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in the Gospels clearly existed, Josephus becomes the slender thread by which such an assumption hangs. And the sound and fury and desperate maneuverings which surround the dissection of those two little passages becomes a din of astonishing proportions. About the only advantage which scholars in this universe enjoy over their counterparts in the other, is that dissenters to the accepted picture of Christianity's origins are here somewhat more numerous and are able to resist commitment to curative asylums.

Setting the Parameters

The second, unfortunate, universe is of course our own, and I think it is not too difficult to understand why Josephus has become such a flash point in the great debate over the existence of any historical Jesus. And yet, he shouldn't be, for two very good reasons. The very fact that so much bitter debate has taken place for so long, so much ink spilled, over those two contentious passages, shows how difficult if not impossible it has been to settle the matter conclusively, as to what, if anything, Josephus actually said about a Christian founder Jesus. The second reason should be equally obvious. The obsessive focus on this one uncertain record is necessitated by the fact that the rest of the evidence is so dismal, so contrary to the orthodox picture. If almost everything outside Josephus points in a different direction, to the essential fiction of the Gospel picture and its central figure, how can Josephus be made to bear on his shoulders, *through two passages whose reliability has thus far remained unsettled*, the counterweight to all this other negative evidence?

I will make clear at the outset what for me is the overriding principle in this debate. As those who have investigated my site will know, I have claimed that an analysis of the non-Gospel record, Christian and non-Christian, both in terms of the negative (the silences found therein)

and the positive (what early writers specifically say about their Christ and faith movement), *when separated from Gospel preconceptions*, strongly supports the validity of doubting the existence of any historical Jesus.

If this be the case, then all that would have to be done where Josephus is concerned is to demonstrate the *inconclusiveness* of his passages about Jesus, to show that their reliability cannot be certain, or even made probable. If the ‘non-existence’ side of the scale in the historical Jesus debate is so weighted down with supporting indications, then anything short of a fairly conclusive demonstration that Josephus is reliable cannot serve to counterbalance that weight, much less ‘prove’ the existence of an historical Jesus. This seems a permissible and logical position to take.

That said, however, I am going to suggest that in this article I will offer, along with some fresh arguing of familiar positions, several new analyses and arguments which are *nothing short of fatal* to the currently complacent view that the Josephan passages, even in a core fashion, are essentially reliable and can be used to support the contention that Jesus existed.

In historical investigation few things, if any, are “proven.” Rather, we try to arrive at probabilities based on the weight of evidence, usually by examining the documentary (or archaeological) record and subjecting it to various forms of reasoning. Indeed, the regular debate on Josephus is full of arguments which look at the text, consider certain factors in relation to it, and commend a conclusion to the observer. “It makes sense that . . .” or “It is unlikely that . . .” is a common approach in presenting one’s position. If I as a mythicist can demonstrate that my arguments for Josephus’ unreliability can stand with equal or better force beside those of my opponents, or if I can demonstrate the weakness or invalidity of those opposing arguments, I have accomplished my task. That task is to remove the force of the two *Antiquities* passages as an impediment to the mythicist position, which is based on an analysis of the documents which *really* matter: the Christian documentary record itself, in the epistles which demonstrate what early Christianity was in fact about, and the Gospels as they can be demonstrated not to constitute works of history.

Many professional scholars in books and commentaries have addressed the Josephus question, but it is also a favorite topic among researchers on the Internet. The most extensive discussion in this category which I am aware of is by Peter Kirby on his Early Christian Writings web site (URL/link at end), who supports the basic reliability of Josephus as a witness to the historical Jesus; and although I will refer to others along the way who have tackled the question, I will use his essay as a general guide for my own remarks—especially as he has urged me to do so.

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Here is an overview Index of the numbered headings in the text, with links to each:

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II: Jesus In Antiquities Of The Jews 20

Manuscript Attestation

1. Absence of textual variation irrelevant - It is becoming increasingly common in a discussion of the Josephan passages to deal first with *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.9.1 (20:200 in the alternate numbering system), since it is often used to support the likelihood of there having been an “original” Testimonium Flavianum which can be distilled from the obvious Christian paragraph in *Antiquities* 18.3.3. And it is becoming increasingly common, it seems, to label the reference to Jesus in 20.9.1 as “generally undisputed” or “certain,” as Kirby does.

One of the arguments made is that this passage is present in all the extant manuscripts. However, our Greek manuscripts date from no earlier than the 10th century, and we do not have a manuscript tradition as rich as that of the New Testament where comparison of texts and their families can reach back into the 3rd century. It is true that we have a direct quotation of the *Antiquities* 20 passage by the church historian Eusebius who wrote in the early 4th century, and it does not essentially vary from the extant one. But this is still over two centuries from the composition of the *Antiquities*, leaving more than sufficient time and scope for emendation to have taken place in some quarters.

As to the non-survival of variants showing differences in the passage under discussion, something often appealed to, it is virtually an axiom in textual criticism that where widely-known passages in a given writer, or passages common to different works, are concerned, scribes will often gravitate toward a common expression, to bring one copy into line with another. That is, a reference or turn of phrase may be changed to reflect the version that is most widely familiar (e.g., a change of some of the teachings in the Didache’s “Two Ways” section to agree with the wording in Jesus’ mouth found in Matthew), and this can extend to the very presence of such elements. This would particularly apply to the two passages in Josephus, since in Christian hands, those references to Jesus would not only have become universally known, they would have constituted the principal *raison d’etre* for Christians continuing to show any interest in Josephus at all. In fact, it would be amazing to discover a manuscript which did not contain those

passages more or less as we now have them (unless literally unearthed from some early time). One can be quite certain that long before the 10th century no manuscript of the *Antiquities* worked on by a Christian could fail to contain the phrase “brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ” in connection with James in 20.9.1.

The same would be true of the *Testimonium Flavianum* in chapter 18, even if the latter, being longer and with more elements, occasionally exhibits some small variance. The enlargement in the Old Russian (Slavonic) version is a separate matter.

Thus the lack of significant textual variation in surviving manuscripts, much less of a missing element, is virtually meaningless and cannot be used to prove anything.

Here, then, is the *Antiquities* 20.9.1 passage containing the reference to Jesus (in bold), as it stands (essentially) in all extant copies, including in Eusebius’ quote of it:

*“But the emperor, when he learned of the death of Festus, sent Albinus to be procurator of Judea . . . But the younger Ananus who, as we have already said, had obtained the high priesthood, was of an exceedingly bold and reckless disposition. . . . Ananus, therefore, being of this character, and supposing that he had a favorable opportunity on account of the fact that Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way, called together the Sanhedrin and brought before them **The Brother Of Jesus, The One Called (The) Christ** [ton adelphon Iesou tou legomenou Christou], James by name, together with some others and accused them of violating the law, and condemned them to be stoned. But those in the city who seemed most moderate and skilled in the law were very angry at this, and sent secretly to the king, requesting him to order Ananus to cease such proceedings . . . And the king, Agrippa, in consequence, deprived him of the high priesthood, which he had held three months, and appointed Jesus, the son of Damnaeus.”*

The Brother of Jesus, the One Called (the) Christ

2. Did Josephus identify James by the “brother of Jesus” reference? - It is commonly argued that Josephus likes to identify for the reader’s sake a freshly introduced figure by some sort of explanatory description. This is his first (and only) reference to James, and thus the identification of Jesus as his brother serves this purpose. There are a number of potential flaws in this position.

Even if the observation about Josephus’ habit is valid, this does not reveal what Josephus may originally have written to identify James. (In a moment I will detail what may be a couple of possibilities.) There is no “certainty” that the identifying phrase as it stands now must have come from Josephus’ pen, for he may have described James by some other reference which was subsequently changed by a Christian copyist. That the latter was the case is suggested by the fact that the second part of the extant phrase is suspiciously identical to the one which concludes Matthew 1:16 (*ho legomenos Christos*: the one called (the) Christ, though the Josephan phrase is in an oblique case: *tou legomenou Christou*). The same phrase also appears in John 4:25.

Even in the face of this match in Matthew and John, it is often claimed that the phrase is “not Christian” because it is not found anywhere else in Christian writings. This observation does not change the fact that it does appear at least twice, including in the most popular and widely known Gospel of all from the mid-second century on, and could thus have exerted an influence on a Christian copyist inserting a phrase into Josephus. Kirby’s suggestion that as Matthew was a Jewish-Christian, the phrase can only be assigned to someone with a strong Jewish identity (ergo: Josephus), thus ruling out most Christian scribes of the latter second century or after, is hardly conclusive or even logically compelling. There could be any number of reasons why it only appears in Matthew (and John), but these appearances identify it as permissibly Christian,

even if relatively rare. By extension, so is its match in *Antiquities* 20. The authenticity of the phrase in Josephus consequently becomes less than reliable on these grounds alone.

Kirby points out that references to Jesus by Christians such as Paul are overwhelmingly of the sort which use the term “Christ” as a proper name, never as part of “him called Christ.” Naturally so, since Paul speaking of his savior god in heaven (one of whose appellations was “Christ,” Greek for Messiah) would scarcely have had any reason to use such a phrase. Such a phrase, in fact, could only appear in the context of referring to an historical man, and probably only in the context of making a declaration that he had been the Messiah. So it is hardly surprising that Christian parlance would tend not to show much usage of it, especially if there were no concept of an historical Jesus on the wider scene until some time into the second century. As for its appearance in Matthew, it comes at the end of the long genealogy the evangelist provides for Jesus, and aside from its perorational value it conveys the quality of a declaration that this descendant of a line of distinguished ancestors going back through David to Abraham was the prophesied Messiah. (I’ll pick up on this “Matthean quality” a little later in connection with the *Antiquities* 20 usage.)

Incidentally, the frequent translation (including by Kirby) of “*tou legomenou Christou*” in *Antiquities* 20 as “the so-called Christ,” with its skeptical and derogatory overtone, is in no way necessary, even if possible, and is in fact belied by the usage of the same phrase in Matthew and John where it obviously cannot have such a connotation. Those using the term in their translations betray a preconceived bias in favor of Josephan authorship.

3. What did Josephus know, or choose to say, about James? - If we are not to beg the question itself, we must ask: if, for the sake of argument, one postulates that Jesus did not exist, could not Josephus have identified his James in some other way? (The question could be asked even outside the context of the historical Jesus debate.) It cannot be ruled out *a priori* that he would have had no way of doing so, for he may have had some other nugget of information available to him. It may even be possible that he offered no descriptive identification for James at all, an option I’ll look at in a moment.

If Josephus did use some other phrase, one having no connection to Jesus, let’s say, it is entirely within the realm of possibility—even probability—that, given Christian practices of emendation evidenced in their own documentary record, a copyist would have felt Josephus’ original identification inadequate or even undesirable, and thus substituted a phrase of his own, namely the one we see today.

Let me deal here with a point often voiced against this possibility: that such an insertion would have been much longer, since a Christian scribe would have taken the opportunity to say much more about Jesus. This is not a compelling argument. Even a naive copyist would have recognized the limitations he faced. In a tightly-packed account of James’ death and its repercussions on Ananus, there would have been no scope for an extended digression about Jesus. It would have destroyed the passage. And if the copyist had a short original phrase in front of him, his tendency might well have been to replace it with one of more or less equal length. Once again, an argument in favor of authenticity is rendered inconclusive or invalid.

But something else could have happened, other than the replacement of a different original phrase. Josephus may have liked *as a rule* to provide a little description for a new character, but suppose that here he chose not to because he felt it unnecessary, or perhaps was unable to do so because he knew so little about the man? Could either of these alternatives be possible, and might they be suggested by the evidence itself?

The possibility that Josephus knew virtually nothing else about James is suggested by the fact that he never tells us anything (outside the disputed phrase) beyond the fact and basic manner of his death. (Note the difference between this and the long, detailed—and somewhat contradictory—account in Hegesippus preserved by Eusebius!) Josephus does not even attach the common cognomen “the Just” to James, something which a Christian copyist would have felt no necessity to remove. (Yes, the fact that the postulated interpolator did not himself insert James’ common nickname, which presumably would have been known to him, could perhaps be appealed to by dissenters. But it’s a minor point, and might be explained by saying that the words used of James by Josephus—see next—wouldn’t have accommodated sticking in “the Just” too well.)

If Josephus did know nothing more, then he would have been forced to introduce James with no identifying enlargement. He would have used some equivalent to “a certain James” or “someone named James.” Now, what in fact do we find in the Greek? The actual words referring directly to James are: *Iakobos onoma autoi*. Translations render this “James by name” or “whose name was James” or “a man named James” (the last by Crossan). But such a phrase, or something close to it, could have stood perfectly well on its own (with a slight change in form), and had the reference to a brother Jesus added to it by a Christian interpolator. Let’s try such an original on for size:

Ananus, therefore . . . called together the Sanhedrin and brought before them one whose name was James, together with some others, and accused them of violating the law and condemned them to be stoned. But those in the city who seemed most moderate and skilled in the law were very angry at this, and sent secretly to the king, requesting him to order Ananus to cease such proceedings. . . .

Not only does this make good sense, it does not jar within the context of the passage. It would hardly have offended Josephus’ own or his readers’ sensibilities. The passage is not about James (much less about Jesus). It is about the high priest Ananus and his fate. Ananus was deposed because he had executed “a man named James and certain others,” an act which incensed some of the moderates among the influential Jews. The reader didn’t have to know anything further about those who had been stoned, especially if Josephus couldn’t provide it. Or, Josephus may have known something more about this James, but chose not to insert such information into an already loaded passage because he didn’t think that his readers needed to be given that information. Remember that he is primarily writing for a gentile audience who would not have required a detailed picture of every minor character they met along the way.

Another suspicious aspect of the attached reference to Jesus is that it comes *first* in the text, that is, the passage reads: “(Ananus) brought before them the brother of Jesus, the one called Christ, James by name, together with some others . . .” Now why would Josephus think to place the *Jesus* idea before the James one? *That* would be a bit of a jar for the reader. He may be minor, but James is the character that brought about Ananus’ downfall and should be foremost in Josephus’ mind at this point. It seems much more natural that he would have said something like: “(Ananus) brought before them a man named James, who was the brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ . . .” In this case, the identifying phrase is added as a descriptive afterthought. On the other hand, if the phrase is the product of a Christian scribe, it is understandable that he, consciously or unconsciously, would have given the reference to Jesus pride of place. The point cannot be too vigorously pressed, but it is another dram of weight to be added to the scale.

The several aspects of this line of argument make it impossible to claim with any conclusiveness or even probability that Josephus “must” have provided a description for James and that it was the phrase we now find there.

4. Would Josephus have identified Jesus by “the one called (the) Christ”? - Another problem associated with the general scholarly assumption about *Antiquities* 20 is the question of whether Josephus would have chosen to identify *Jesus* by the phrase now found there. (We really have a double identification here: one for James—that he is Jesus’ brother, the second for Jesus—that he’s the one called the Christ.) But would Josephus have been likely to offer the latter phrase? There are difficulties in assuming that he did.

First of all, scholars get themselves into a contradiction when they claim that the reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20 indicates that Josephus must have referred to him earlier. If so, his use of the phrase “the one called (the) Christ” would imply that the point about the Christ was included in that earlier reference; yet, as we shall see, the very phrase in *Antiquities* 18 which contains it has been rejected as a later Christian insertion into the Josephan original, since it is so blatantly Christian. Thus Josephus would be alluding to something he hadn’t said. And his readers might have been left wondering what he was talking about. (I’ll come back to this problem when discussing *Antiquities* 18.)

This objection can be broadened, however. The Jewish Messiah concept (“Christ” in Greek) would not necessarily be a subject with which Josephus’ readers were all that familiar. If Josephus were going to introduce the term, one would expect him to feel constrained to provide a discussion of it somewhere. In fact, the Messiah idea was such a dramatic one, that if one of his characters had actually been designated as such by his followers, Josephus could hardly have avoided addressing this unusual man and episode at some length.

Yet curiously enough, the whole Jewish tradition of messianic expectation is a subject Josephus seems to avoid, for he nowhere directly describes it, not even in connection with the rebellious groups and agitators in the period prior to the Jewish War. (His one clear reference to the messianic “oracles” of the Jews, the object of whom, he claims, was Vespasian [*Jewish War* 6.5.4], is dealt with in very cursory fashion.) This silence and this reluctance (if it be so) would seem to preclude the likelihood that he would introduce the subject at all, especially as a simple aside, in connection with Jesus.

Moreover, if he is merely looking for some quick way to identify this Jesus for his readers (one of many by that name in his chronicle), he has a much easier, and less charged, way to do so. He simply has to say, “the one who was crucified by Pilate.” This is a point which supposedly *did* appear in the “original” passage of *Antiquities* 18 postulated by scholars, one that would have been easily remembered by the reader. If in fact Josephus had written the “authentic” Testimonium, with no reference to the Christ, the point about Pilate would have been the automatic choice. (This ignores, of course, the consideration that no such crucifixion by Pilate actually took place.)

5. Was the reference to Jesus a marginal gloss? - If it is a legitimate possibility that Josephus had no phrase where the present one now stands—a possibility I am increasingly leaning toward—what can we say about the suggestion by G. A. Wells (and others) that the “Jesus” phrase is simply a marginal gloss? Despite the scorn which Kirby and others have heaped on Wells for suggesting it, the idea is anything but ludicrous. The mere physical shape and character of the phrase would fit perfectly well with a notation in the margin which an early copyist could have made to supply the identification which Josephus lacked, a copyist who was bothered by the fact that the historian had made no such link. Following the usual process, the margin notation would then have gotten transferred into the book at a later time.

As to the content of the phrase, who knows why the interpolator may have chosen to echo Matthew 1:16? Perhaps for the same reason that Matthew used words which had the effect of

declaring Jesus to have been the Messiah. The scribe may have been expressing his own affirmation of personal faith, especially in the face of Josephus' insolent disregard of Jesus altogether. He may have been working the previous day on transcribing that first chapter of the Gospel. Perhaps he had a personal preference for the Matthean turn of phrase—who knows? We lose sight of the fact that so much in history, big and small, depends not on the larger, formalized issues as we see them from a distance (or have constructed them), but on nitty-gritty, mundane circumstances—such as Napoleon not getting the battle of Waterloo off to a timely start because of a 'personal discomfort' problem related to sitting on his horse. Such things cannot be dismissed or overlooked simply because they offend our desire for neatness and consequentiality.

(However, the marginal gloss option may prove unnecessary when I come to consider the case of the "lost reference" to James.)

6. Did Josephus refer to James as "brother of the Lord"? - There is another possibility which I alluded to earlier, that Josephus did in fact have a phrase identifying James: namely, the same as the one used by Paul in Galatians 1:19, "brother of the Lord." I have in several places suggested—as have others before me—that the phrase did not, in Paul's mind, refer to James as the sibling of an historical Jesus. Rather, it constituted a kind of title attached to James as the most prominent figure, perhaps the head, of a Jewish "brotherhood" of apostles of the spiritual Christ, located in Jerusalem, the one referred to in 1 Corinthians 9 and 15. As a sect they may have been known as "brothers of the Lord" (as suggested by 1 Cor. 9:5 and even by the slight variant in Philippians 1:14), with a special designation of James as *the* "brother of the Lord."

I will not repeat here my arguments for (a) the legitimate interpretation of "brother" in the sense of "brethren" and (b) the supporting evidence in the ascriptions to the (pseudonymous) epistles of James and Jude that early Christians knew of no such sibling relationship of James to their cultic Christ. (See my response to Sean.)

There is nothing unusual, despite Kirby's protestations, in an individual or a sect referring to itself as "brother(s) of the Lord" in reference to a deity. Indeed, the phrase may originally have referred to God the Father, and if so, then Josephus may himself have known of this phrase associated with James, and understood it with the meaning of "God" when attaching it to him in *Antiquities* 20. It would have required no further comment on his part, let alone some explanatory passage here or elsewhere, talking about who this "Lord" was. Over half a century later, as Eusebius' quote of Hegesippus indicates, Christians understood the phrase (and others like it) to refer to the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth and to presumed family relationships to him, but this is much later than the time of Josephus, when an historical Jesus was well established.

More of a problem arises, perhaps, when one considers how and why this possible designation in *Antiquities* 20 was changed to the one witnessed by Origen and all later copies: from "brother of the Lord" to "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ." Kirby has suggested that there would have been no reason for a scribe to tamper with this passage, since the phrase was now understood with the sibling meaning. Kirby asks: "Who would want to change 'Lord' to 'Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah'?" and he notes that the former phrase has survived in Galatians 1:19 completely intact. As for the latter objection, this is an entirely different matter. A Christian document, especially one by Paul, hardly needs amending on a point like this for an exclusively Christian readership. But where the historical works of a non-Christian historian were concerned, Christian copyists may have felt otherwise, and regarded "brother of the Lord" as an inadequate identification of the new historical Jesus for the general reader.

But it's a sticky point, I admit. And overall, I am less inclined now than when I first made the suggestion a few years ago, to consider that this is the route by which "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ" entered *Antiquities* 20. The proposition that Josephus, knowing next to nothing about James or choosing not to elaborate on him, simply made no designation for him beyond a phrase like "one named James" seems more likely to me now, with the reference to Jesus being invented by a Christian and inserted into the text. But in this process, I think there was another factor involved, and this brings me to the so-called "lost reference," as styled by Kirby.

The "Lost Reference" to James and Jesus

7. James as the cause of the fall of Jerusalem - In Origen three times and in Eusebius once, there appears the statement that Josephus believed that the calamity of the Jewish War (66-70) was visited upon the Jews by God because of their murder of James the Just. This murder is recounted by Josephus in *Antiquities* 20.9.1, where the phrase "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ" is attached to James. But in that passage, as the reader may remember, the idea of a causal link between James' death and the fall of Jerusalem does not appear, nor does it appear anywhere else in our extant copies of Josephus. From Origen, it would be possible to conclude that the idea was once there in *Antiquities* 20 and has since been removed, or that it appeared somewhere else in Josephus and was removed or disappeared from that other spot.

Peter Kirby claims that this lost reference to James "has been almost universally ignored by critics," but this is not quite true. Others have noted it (e.g., Charles Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.18), though in less prominent and detailed a fashion. Robert Eisenman also deals with it in his recent book *James, the Brother of Jesus* (p.234f). But I seem to remember someone like Karl Kautsky making the assumption that when Origen referred to the link between James' death and the fall of Jerusalem, he was drawing on a statement he found in his copy of *Antiquities* 20.9.1, thus proving that this passage had been tampered with. (S. Brandon seems to make the same assumption, in *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, p.52 and 111f.) Wells deals with the 'lost reference' correctly in his first book, *The Jesus of the Early Christians*, p.193-4, but in too condensed a fashion, I think, which may be lost on the uninitiated reader.

The Kautsky assumption is almost certainly erroneous. Both Eisenman and Kirby point out that in the three passages in which Origen refers to the link between James' death and the fall of Jerusalem (*Commentary on Matthew* 10:17, *Contra Celsum* 1:47 & 2:13), he is not making a direct quotation of Josephus' words, nor does he point to a specific location; only in the first case does he make a passing mention of the *Antiquities* in general (see below). But we can be fairly sure that Origen cannot be drawing the idea from his copy of the *Antiquities* 20 account about James, because a quotation of that very passage in Eusebius does not show it (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.22). Here Eusebius had just talked about a reputed Jewish opinion (seemingly of the past, and not necessarily held by Jews of his own time) that the destruction of Jerusalem was caused by God's wrath directed at them over the martyrdom of James, and he points out (*ibid.*, 23:21) that Josephus concurred in this opinion:

"Josephus has not hesitated to testify this in his writings, where he says, 'These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus who is called (the) Christ. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man.' "

Eusebius, like Origen, does not identify the location of this passage in Josephus, but he goes on (23:22f) to give his readers another quote from Josephus, this one with its location:

"And the same writer also records his death in the 20th book of his Antiquities in the following words: 'But the emperor, when he learned . . . ' "

Eusebius reproduces the full *Antiquities* 20.9.1 passage, which reads the same as that given earlier, and (like our extant copies) contains no reference to a causal link between James' death and the fall of Jerusalem. From this, and from the language he uses to introduce the second quote, the inevitable conclusion is that Eusebius' first quote is from some other passage in Josephus' writings, one which subsequently disappeared or was removed, since no extant manuscript shows it anywhere. It is a natural and likely inference that Origen's three-fold reference to the James-Jerusalem link is not from *Antiquities* 20 either, but from this same now-lost passage which Eusebius quotes. (Because of this multiple witness, and because Eusebius makes a direct quote, the suggestion that the memories of both commentators are being confused with something Hegesippus might have said in the same vein, while Josephus in fact made no such comment at all, is unlikely.)

The reference 'in passing' to *Antiquities of the Jews* in Origen's first quote (*Commentary on Matthew* 10:17, which reads: ". . .that Flavius Josephus, who wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews* in 20 books, when wishing to exhibit the cause why . . .") may present a complication here, since on the surface it might suggest that Origen is drawing from *Antiquities* 20. But this would require assuming—perhaps as Kautsky and Brandon did—that the link between the death of James and the fall of Jerusalem was present in Origen's copy but not in that of Eusebius (indicating Christian tampering with the former).

That may be possible, but I think it is more probable that Origen is confused about where in Josephus he had read it. *Antiquities* 20 dealt with the death of James, while only the lost reference brought in the link to the fall of Jerusalem as well. Origen, at least at that moment, may have thought that *Antiquities* 20 contained both points. The fact that he does not locate it specifically in chapter 20 or anywhere else (see the quote above) suggests that he is simply expressing a vague recollection. This is easier to postulate than to assume that the link was in Origen's copy, but that it was removed before Eusebius quoted it or that Eusebius was using a different manuscript line which never contained it—although both options are possible.

But there is a corollary to this observation which could be very important. If Origen is lifting into his memory of *Antiquities* 20 a point which only appeared in the lost reference (the James-Jerusalem link), he may be dragging in something else as well which only appeared there. Eusebius' quote shows that the phrase "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ" was present in the lost reference. Since Origen nowhere proves otherwise, the source of Origen's three-fold mention of "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ" may be solely the lost reference, and *the phrase may not have been present in the Antiquities 20 passage of Origen's copy*. Naturally, this cannot be proven, but it presents us with this situation: outside of Eusebius (who, almost a century later, quotes the passage directly from his copy of Josephus), nothing before our earliest extant manuscripts gives clear evidence of the presence of the Jesus reference in *Antiquities* 20.

8. What was the source of the "lost reference" idea? - Both Eisenman and Kirby speculate as to where the "lost reference" might have been. Kirby opts for *Jewish War* 6.5.3, following Josephus' account of the Roman siege. Possibly so, and I won't argue over its location. In any case, the reference is now gone. We also have to note another of its features, that it contained the phrase "brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ," identical to the extant reference in *Antiquities* 20.

Which brings us to a very critical consideration. Who wrote that now-lost passage? Kirby argues for the view that it is original to Josephus, namely that Josephus himself wrote:

“These Things Happened To The Jews To Avenge James The Just, Who Was A Brother Of Jesus Who Is Called (The) Christ. For The Jews Slew Him, Although He Was A Most Just Man.”

I have to disagree with this judgment. (So, by the way, does Wells, who however spends no time arguing the question.)

Kirby points out that Hegesippus, as reported by Eusebius, witnesses to Christians of his time (mid 2nd century) holding the view that it was James’ murder which prompted God to punish the Jews. (At least the implication is there in the Eusebius quotation.) But in view of the fact that Origen railed against this view, and because Origen witnesses to the more natural view one would expect to find among Christians—that it was the killing of *Jesus* which was the source of God’s wrath against the Jews—Kirby suggests that the sentiment in the lost passage is a *Jewish product*, something which Josephus reported and concurred with. Kirby must fall back, then, on the suggestion that the Hegesippus tradition originated in an earlier Jewish one, which Christians took over.

The incongruity here should be obvious. If the tradition began with the Jews, it may be difficult to understand why Christians of Hegesippus’ time or earlier would have adopted it, given the more natural choice regarding Jesus. But we have to ask an even more telling question. If James was a prominent *Christian* figure (even of the so-called “Jewish-Christian” variety) and brother of a supposed subversive who had been crucified, why would non-Christian Jews tend to give him such an honor as to believe that God had wreaked upon them the greatest calamity in Jewish history simply because of his death? Moreover, this would imply that Christianity, and by extension Jesus’ own status, *was supported by God*. Would Jews have believed such a thing? Hardly. The proposition, therefore, makes very little sense and is virtually impossible to accept.

9. Did Christians originate the James-Jerusalem link? - Before going on to the central question of whether Josephus himself would have subscribed to and set down in writing such a sentiment, let’s see if a different origin for the idea makes better sense. Not that it arose with Jews, but rather with Christians. After all, in some sense, James was a believer in the Christ (witness 1 Cor. 15:7) and thus would not have been regarded as a mainstream Jew. Hegesippus, if we can interpret him properly through Eusebius, witnesses to an actual Christian acceptance that the destruction of Jerusalem resulted from the death of James. It is thus more likely that James was regarded with esteem in certain Christian circles, and that they themselves developed the tradition that the Jews suffered on account of James. The dynamic here makes more sense, too, in that by the 2nd century, Christianity was splitting from the synagogue, and hostility existed between the two groups. Rather than assume that Jews chose to heap this kind of condemnation on their own heads, it makes much better sense to see the Christians as “explaining” (perhaps in taunting tones) that the Jews’ calamity was their own fault, because they had murdered James the Just. Indeed, the lost reference has suggestions of this taunting tone, as I’ll go into in a moment.

First, however, we must address the apparent problem associated with my suggestion. As alluded to above, would not Christians have tended, in seeking to taunt the Jews and explain to them why their city had been destroyed, to seize on the crucifixion of Jesus—as Origen demonstrates? One explanation, however, solves the problem. The need to interpret the destruction of Jerusalem would likely have developed early, long before Hegesippus. At such a time, *an historical Jesus and historical crucifixion had not yet been invented*, or at least would not have been widely

disseminated beyond a few early Gospel communities, and thus the idea would not have existed in the broader Christian world. Instead, James the Just, head of a prominent sect in Jerusalem which believed in a spiritual Christ, murdered by the Jewish high priest just before the War, would have been the natural, and perhaps only candidate available. And although the idea of an historical Jesus was well under way by Hegesippus' time, the force of the original tradition about James' death could still be operating, to be supplanted by the concept of Jesus' role only later, perhaps around the time Origen is expressing his dissenting opinion in the early 3rd century.

10. Could Josephus have written the James-Jerusalem link? - Can we really entertain the possibility that the lost reference is from the pen of Josephus? First of all, the tone of the passage has a faintly taunting quality about it, certainly an uncompromisingly critical one. Josephus is quite capable of condemning certain elements on the Jewish pre-War scene, such as the Zealots, but no such nuanced analysis is present here. Calamities happened "to the Jews." "The Jews slew him." The latter blanket judgment would hardly be fair, and contradicts the known passage in *Antiquities* 20. There Josephus is quite specific in imputing responsibility for the killing of James to Ananus and the clique around him. Indeed, he highlights the anger of the Jewish "moderates" at this act. This makes the phrase "the Jews slew him" hardly in keeping with the actual event, nor with Josephus' own recorded sentiments about it. And he would hardly envision God punishing the entire Jewish nation for a murder he himself portrays as the responsibility of an upstart high priest, one whom other Jews promptly condemned and had removed.

A second, minor, point against Josephan authorship is found in the fact that the lost reference adds "the Just" to James, whereas it is missing in the more reliable reference to James (the basic phrase) in *Antiquities* 20.

The same objections put forward above to the idea that Jews in general had come up with the tradition that James' death had caused the destruction of Jerusalem apply to Josephus himself. Would Josephus have been willing to dump so heavily on the Jewish nation, as well as to accept the implication that God was on the Christian side? Is Josephus likely to have held the Christian James in such high esteem—a man linked to a troublesome sect, one who (in the view of my dissenters) had a brother who was executed? He spends only a handful of words talking about James in *Antiquities* 20, none of them even intimating such a concept. Had Josephus subscribed to such a tradition as is found in the lost reference, he would surely have taken the time somewhere to give his readers a fuller, more laudatory account of the man over whom God destroyed the Jewish state and leveled his own holy Temple to the ground!

Kirby suggests that "Josephus was somewhat superstitious and liked to find mysterious causes for events. . . . Josephus was looking for causes of the calamity that befell Jerusalem, and the unjust execution of a man in 62 CE by the high priest is as good as any."

Well, I think Josephus has given us clear evidence of what he actually saw as the cause of the calamity. The whole tenor of his writings in regard to the Jewish War is an open condemnation of the revolutionary movement which led up to it, beginning with Judas the Galilean (in 6 CE), together with the immediate machinations of the Roman governor Gessius Florus who, as Josephus presents it, deliberately enticed the nation into war. "It was in Gessius Florus's time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper (that is, the revolutionary movement begun with Judas) . . . and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority" (*Antiquities* 18.1.6). Earlier in 18.1.1, he condemns men like Judas, who "laid the foundations of our future miseries." Right after an account of his third agitator of the people, an "Egyptian false prophet," Josephus describes another "inflammation" of the "diseased body" (meaning the movement for revolt): the activities of a marauding Zealotic band agitating for rebellion against Rome. He comments, "and this till all Judea was filled with the effects of their

madness. And thus the flame was every day more and more blown up, till it came to a direct war” (*Jewish War* 2.13.6). There is no hint of any role for James’ death here or anywhere else in Josephus’ analysis of the causes of the conflagration. Nor do I think, superstitious or not, that Josephus, as a competent and sophisticated historian, would have been guilty of such a naive concept, one that involved so great an imbalance between cause and effect.

There remains yet another serious objection to the idea that Josephus wrote the lost passage. Would he, writing for gentiles under Flavian patronage, attribute the fall of Jerusalem to the motivations of the Jewish God using the Romans as a pawn for his purposes? I think it would have cost him his privileged position to so belittle Roman and Flavian control over events. Thus, it is more likely that Josephus would have viewed the matter as his sponsors did: that Jerusalem fell because the Romans had decided the Judean problem had to be solved, the revolutionary movement crushed. The destruction of the Jewish state was an expression of Roman might and invincibility, and the inevitability of Rome’s ruling position in the world. Josephus, in *Jewish War* 3.5.8, declares that one of his purposes in writing is “to deter others who may be tempted to revolt.” This would hardly be accomplished by saying that Jerusalem fell because of the manipulative actions of the Jewish God.

It is true that in a few places—almost all of them in the earlier work, *Jewish War*—Josephus expresses sentiments suggesting that the actions of the Zealots in the years leading up to the conflict, their murders and mayhem, and especially their defiling of the Temple’s purity, led God to acquiesce in the destruction of the city and Temple by the Romans as a means of purification. (These passages, as well as much else, are itemized on G. J. Goldberg’s very comprehensive and informative “Flavius Josephus” site at <<http://members.aol.com/FLJOSEPHUS/home.htm>>). As for the matter of the destruction of temple and city, I would offer these observations about such passages:

1. *No mention is made of James’ murder, which further supports the rejection of the lost reference as authored by Josephus.*
2. *The above noted sentiments stand in some tension with those passages I quoted earlier in this section in which Josephus allocates the causes of the War to the revolutionary movement and the Romans’ reaction to it, as well as to the role of the governor Gessius Florus. However:*
3. *While Josephus is concerned with justifying Roman actions and providing a lesson to the world at large—a lesson of paramount importance to his Flavian patrons—that rebellion against Rome is futile, he also, especially in the earlier work, kept his eye on his own countrymen and their interests. Thus Josephus sometimes offers comments and explanations in terms of Jewish concerns about prophecy, ritual purity and divine providence, and these explanations do not always gel with others.*

From the Lost Reference to Antiquities 20

11. Was there a dual interpolation of the “brother of Jesus” reference? - We thus arrive at the impossibility of accepting the lost reference as authentic to Josephus. It has to be a Christian interpolation, now disappeared. (As to why or how, I’ll look at that shortly.) Eusebius quotes the interpolation, wherever he found it. Origen refers to it indirectly. Both are quite possibly using copies from the same manuscript family; both are working in the eastern Mediterranean. The interpolation thus predates Origen, though it does not have to predate Hegesippus since the latter is likely, as noted above, to be based on an idea developed in Christian tradition some time after the Jewish War, and not dependent on anything written in a manuscript of Josephus or anywhere else.

But we are now faced with something truly significant. This interpolated passage from a Christian hand contains the phrase: “brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ,” attached to James. First, the words are thus identified as Christian, and consequently the claim already countered earlier that it is a non-Christian phrase collapses completely. But even more important: how do we relate the fact of its presence in a Christian interpolation to the presence of the identical words in *Antiquities* 20? As Wells suggests (*ibid*, p.194), just on general principle its identification as an interpolation in one spot leads to the “reasonable inference” that it is an interpolation in the other.

But let’s look at the point more closely. There are a number of theoretical possibilities:

1. *The interpolator of the lost reference (perhaps into Jewish War 6.5.3) has copied an already existing phrase in Antiquities 20, deliberately or unconsciously.*
2. *He was not influenced by Antiquities 20, but by coincidence and perhaps under the influence of Matthew 1:16 he worded his phrase in the same way.*
3. *The interpolator was not drawing from Antiquities 20 because the phrase referring to Jesus was not there yet. Instead, a reverse imitation took place. The Antiquities 20 phrase came into being later by copying the first, now-lost interpolation. Both interpolations may be from the same hand, though that is impossible to tell.*

Option 1 has inherent problems. Would a Christian copyist, interpolating an entire new passage into *Jewish War*, bother to dig into the *Antiquities* for a phrase to describe James and not simply come up with one of his own? In fact, it has been argued that the phrase “the one called (the) Christ” in *Antiquities* 20 is un-Christian—and even derogatory!—which is taken as evidence that it cannot be from the hand of an interpolator but must be authentic to Josephus. If this were the case, surely the Christian interpolator of the lost passage, even had he thought of it, would have tended to avoid using the *Antiquities* 20 phrase. If others wish to argue that the interpolator was deliberately copying Josephus’ words and style to ‘mask’ the interpolation, fine. I’d love to know that this argument is acceptable, that a Christian copyist inserting something into Josephus will deliberately try to imitate his style and vocabulary. I could certainly use that argument—and will—in connection with *Antiquities* 18. And the fact that the interpolator could be creative and add “the Just” to James, which he would not have found in *Antiquities* 20, suggests that he would have felt no compunction about putting in his own phrase rather than the ‘skeptical un-Christian’ one, and so we would not find the lost passage as it stands quoted in Eusebius. At best, this option is quite inconclusive.

Option 2 is inherently less likely, though not impossible. Again, others should find it made problematic by their claim that, being un-Christian and even derogatory, the interpolator would not have used this phrase.

That leaves option 3. Let me repeat that I find no problem in envisioning *some* Christian copyist coming up with this phrase for the now-lost reference (“the one called the Christ”), probably under the influence of Matthew 1:16, and to convey the same idea. Here, then, we have a perfectly feasible chain of events explaining the presence of an interpolated reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20. It was put there, through process of imitation, by a Christian who simply lifted it from the lost reference, itself an earlier interpolation, probably in the *Jewish War*. This second insertion (the scribe is casting about for a phrase, not composing an entire passage) may have served to satisfy someone who felt that “a certain James,” or “a man named James,” especially one whom Josephus had in no way linked to Jesus of Nazareth, could not stand without enlargement. Or, if the phrase “brother of the Lord” (or some other description) had stood in

Antiquities 20, the force of the earlier interpolation, perhaps triggered by the common word “brother,” could have led the copyist to replace Josephus’ designation with one considered more suitable. My preference now is to opt for the former. There is nothing so common in textual criticism as to recognize that scribes insert—perhaps beginning with a marginal gloss—clarifications and enlargements when they think such things are needed in the text. (In this particular case, since I am arguing for a process of imitation from the lost reference, the marginal gloss element would not apply.)

We might even speculate that the same scribe was responsible for both. Once he had placed the lost reference to James’ murder being responsible for the fall of Jerusalem into the one text, with its identifying link of James to Jesus, he may have felt that the other reference to James in *Antiquities* 20—the genuine one—should show the same identifying phrase, whether nothing stood there, or a designation like “brother of the Lord.” Perhaps he felt that Josephus would have been consistent, and so he altered the *Antiquities* 20 reference. But this, as I say, is impossible to tell.

Kirby ridicules the idea that a single scribe could have “sneakily inserted” the “brother of Jesus” reference into both *Jewish War* and *Antiquities* 20. But I have shown that the situation is more subtle than that. My argument hinges on the observation that it is so highly unlikely that Josephus could have authored the lost reference himself, we can safely reject the possibility that he did. Once this is accepted, everything falls into place. We must remember, too, that the insertion of the lost reference probably took place relatively soon after Josephus’ publication, no more than half a century or so, since later than that, the interpolator would have tended to reflect the replacement tradition evidenced by Origen, that it was the death of *Jesus* which had been responsible for the fall of Jerusalem. At such an early time, no frantic Christian scribes had to rush around inserting false passages into all the manuscripts of both works.

To judge by the common version of Origen and Eusebius (the one in Egypt, the other a little further north in Caesarea), both emendations were probably made in the east, perhaps in the latter 2nd century (or the *Antiquities* 20 interpolation may have been inserted a while later), to one of the few manuscript sets of Josephus that would have been circulating in Christian circles there. It is not surprising to find the chain proceeding from that dual emendation and ending up on the desks of two commentators working in the same area less than a century apart. As time went on, Christians gained control of all documentation, so that common knowledge and imitation eventually ensured that all new copies of the *Antiquities* would contain the now-accepted reference to James as “brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ.”

12. Losing the lost reference - The final, and somewhat perplexing, point to address in connection with *Antiquities* 20 and the lost reference is this: what happened to that latter passage, the interpolation which set everything in motion? Origen and Eusebius read it, and about half a century later, Jerome (in *Illustrious Men* 2) refers to it obliquely, but thereafter it disappears and fails to show up in any extant manuscript. Both Eisenman and Kirby suggest that it was removed, under the influence of Origen’s criticism that Josephus should have specified the death of *Jesus* as the cause of God’s wrath and the destruction of the city. Although the issue is not critical to my argument, I find this almost incredible.

Why would a copyist follow only half of Origen’s advice? One would think it a near certainty that in removing the offending link with James, he would have replaced it with the new, preferred link to Jesus. We would then find the lost reference in our manuscripts of the *Jewish War*, but expressing the view that “these things happened to the Jews to avenge the crucifixion of Jesus.” In any case, Jerome witnesses to the lost reference’s continued existence into the latter 4th century (though he, too, was working in the east). By then, many copies of Josephus would

presumably be circulating, including in Latin, and copyists would face a monumental problem in removing the lost reference from all of them. Would the process of imitation have worked as efficiently where a deletion is concerned? At the very least, surely somebody somewhere along the line would have chosen the option to change instead of delete. Thus it would seem that there are too many difficulties involved in the proposition put forward by Eisenman and Kirby.

My own guess would be that, because the lost reference was an interpolation to begin with, it found its way only into certain manuscript lines which eventually died out. Why then, the reader might ask, did the lost reference die out, but not its “imitation” in *Antiquities* 20? The problem may not, in principle, be so difficult. If the lost reference was in only some copies of *Jewish War*, then its disappearance would be part of the transmission history (an eventually defunct one) which certain manuscript lines of that work underwent. Once the phrase about Jesus, copying the one placed in *Jewish War*, was inserted into the passage in *Antiquities* 20, it would have undergone its own fate, in this case surviving and spreading westward through imitative transmission, part of the manuscript history of a different document. It’s a difficult problem on either side of the debate, but we cannot hope to uncover the intricacies of manuscript transmission in a case like this over a period of several centuries, especially when we have no extant copies from that period. But as I say, the issue is not critical to my argument.

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Here in summary (following the numbered headings in the text) is the argument thus far, relating to *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.9.1:

1. Absence of textual variation irrelevant - The practice of imitation and Christian interests operating before the earliest extant manuscripts of the 10th century would ensure that all copies show the two references to Jesus.

2. Did Josephus identify James by the “brother of Jesus” reference? - The reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20 could be Christian, since it echoes the phrase in Matthew 1:16 and John 4:25. The argument that this is not a Christian mode of expression is weak.

3. What did Josephus know, or choose to say, about James? - Josephus may have used some other piece of information to identify Jesus, or he may have said something like “a certain James by name” (which the present wording would suggest), perhaps because he knew next to nothing about James or chose not to elaborate. Either way, a dissatisfied copyist would have inserted the present reference, not making a longer one because of space and content considerations. The order of ideas, Jesus first, James second, is suspicious.

4. Would Josephus have identified Jesus by “the one called (the) Christ”? - The *Antiquities* 20 phrase implies an earlier reference to “the Christ,” but scholars reject the one in *Antiquities* 18 as an insertion. Any “Christ” reference would require treatment of the Jewish Messiah tradition, but Josephus gives none and seems to avoid the subject entirely. He should have preferred to identify Jesus by referring to his crucifixion by Pilate.

5. Was the reference to Jesus a marginal gloss? - In the absence of any descriptive phrase for James, a marginal gloss would have been natural, and the phrase referring to Jesus has that shape and character. The copyist might have mimicked Matthew 1:16 as an affirmation that Jesus had been the Messiah. (A marginal gloss may be superfluous in view of No. 9.)

6. Did Josephus refer to James as “brother of the Lord”? - Josephus may originally have referred to James as “brother of the Lord,” as Paul does in Galatians 1:19, this perhaps being a

widely-used cognomen of James as head of the Jerusalem brotherhood, one Josephus may have been familiar with and even understood as referring to God. Being in a non-Christian work, it may have been changed to reflect the new historical reality of Jesus with a more general audience in mind. (This is no longer my preferred option.)

7. James as the cause of the fall of Jerusalem - The “lost reference” to James’ death as the cause of the fall of Jerusalem contained the identical phrase about Jesus that we have in *Antiquities* 20. This may have been the source of Origen’s “brother of Jesus” phrase and not *Antiquities* 20, leaving only Eusebius as a witness to it before our extant manuscripts.

8. What was the source of the “lost reference” idea? - The James-Jerusalem link is almost impossible to accept as a Jewish product, since James was a Christian and it would imply that Christianity was supported by God; nor would Jews have been likely to heap that kind of condemnation on themselves. Eusebius’ report that Jews believed this does not seem to refer to his own time, and would be unreliable for an earlier period.

9. Did Christians originate the James-Jerusalem link? - Instead, it makes better sense that Christians originated it, as a (perhaps taunting) explanation for the Jews’ misfortune. They could choose James’ death rather than Jesus’ crucifixion because the idea of an historical Jesus had not yet developed.

10. Could Josephus have written the James-Jerusalem link? - The idea contradicts Josephus’ own account of James’ death, and would have impelled much fuller treatment of James had he caused such a dramatic effect. Throughout his writings, Josephus identifies the causes of the Jewish War as the revolutionary movement and the actions of the governor Florus. For his gentile readers, he would have been unlikely to portray the Romans and his patron Flavians as pawns in the Jewish God’s retributive purposes.

11. Was there a dual interpolation of the “brother of Jesus” reference? - If the lost reference, with its “brother of Jesus” phrase is necessarily a Christian insertion, this increases the likelihood that the phrase in *Antiquities* 20 is an insertion as well. The best postulation is a process of imitation from the lost reference to *Antiquities* 20. (And see No. 3 above.)

12. Losing the lost reference - Rather than removal, I suggest that the manuscript lines which contained the lost reference died out, while other lines never had it.

The final argument against the authenticity of *Antiquities* 20 will have to wait until the authenticity of *Antiquities* 18 has been addressed, but if the reliability of an original core to the *Testimonium Flavianum* can be seriously undermined, or even rejected, the reliability of the reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20 must collapse with it.

[For later use: link to summary arguments relating to *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.3.]

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III: Jesus In Antiquities Of The Jews 18

The “Testimonium Flavianum”

One of the main arguments used to support an original reference to Jesus behind the obvious Christian paragraph which now stands in *Antiquities* 18:3:3 (18:63f in the alternate numbering system) is the assumed reliability of the passing reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20. Josephus, so

the claim goes, would not have inserted such a skeletal reference to Jesus, the one identifying James as his brother, if he had not given the reader some fuller account of him at some previous point. The throwaway line, it is said, implies some previous reference. I think I have sufficiently undercut the force of that argument by demonstrating that the *Antiquities* 20 reference cannot be judged reliable at all, much less “undisputed.” This leaves *Antiquities* 18.3.3 to stand or fall on its own merits.

Now, it is a curious fact that older generations of scholars had no trouble dismissing this entire passage as a Christian construction. Charles Guignebert, for example, in his *Jesus* (ET 1956, p.17, originally published 1933), calls it “a pure Christian forgery.” Before him, Lardner, Harnack and Schurer, along with others, declared it entirely spurious. Today, most serious scholars have decided the passage is a mix: original parts rubbing shoulders with later Christian additions.

Here is the famous passage—known as the “Testimonium Flavianum”—in full, with the widely-regarded additions in bold, though there is some variation on this among scholars (such as whether the phrase in square brackets ought to be regarded as authentic):

*“Now about this time there lived Jesus a wise man, **If One Ought To Call Him A Man**, for he was a doer of wonderful works, [a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure]. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. **He Was The Messiah**. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place had come to love him did not forsake him. **For He Appeared To Them Alive Again On The Third Day, As The Holy Prophets Had Predicted These And Many Other Wonderful Things About Him**. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, continues to the present day.”*

It is obvious to all that Josephus would never have said that Jesus “was the Messiah,” or that “he appeared alive to them again on the third day,” since this would mean he subscribed to Christian doctrine. And “if one ought to call him a man” is clearly a Christian reverential remark. Opinion is mixed about the ‘teacher of the truth’ reference (though Kirby and some of the authorities he draws on, such as John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, accept it). Some have suggested that instead of the blatant “he was the Messiah,” Josephus may have written that “he was believed to be the Messiah.” I will not trouble to repeat the obvious arguments against the authenticity of the blatantly Christian phrases, or their existence much before Eusebius, who in the early 4th century quotes the passage in full in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1.11.7). The silence of all Christian commentators before him about such things (indeed about the entire Testimonium) is clear evidence of this. Some have even suggested that Eusebius himself was the interpolator.

This breakdown of authentic and inauthentic parts is not, from the point of view of the text itself, unreasonable. But it assumes, one, that there was an historical Jesus to whom Josephus could have referred, and two, that Josephus could have penned even the reduced version. As for the first point, much argumentation starts from the preconceived position that, well, Josephus talks about other messianic agitators, like Judas the Galilean and Theudas the magician, so it seems reasonable to think he would have made *some* reference to Jesus, who for him would have fallen into the same category. (Keep that last point in mind for later!) From the mythicist point of view, of course, this is begging the question, and since, as I maintained at the beginning of this article, strong evidence exists outside Josephus to indicate that no human Jesus stood at the beginning of the Christian movement, then the Testimonium can validly be questioned in its entirety, *without such preconceptions*.

Let's look at the ostensibly genuine passage as it is commonly distilled from the later composite. I'll use Meier's reconstruction from *A Marginal Jew* (though not its translation):

“Now About This Time There Lived Jesus A Wise Man, For He Was A Doer Of Wonderful Works And A Teacher Of Such Men As Receive The Truth With Pleasure. He Won Over Many Jews And Many Of The Greeks. When Pilate, Upon Hearing Him Accused By Men Of The Highest Standing Among Us, Had Condemned Him To Be Crucified, Those Who In The First Place Had Come To Love Him Did Not Forsake Him. And The Tribe Of The Christians, So Called After Him, Continues To The Present Day.”

The Content of the Testimonium Flavianum

13. Josephan phrases and vocabulary in the Testimonium - The first argument usually put forward by defenders of this “original” is that it is full of phrases and vocabulary characteristic of Josephus. “Now about this time . . .” is a common expression; Josephus uses “wise man” of Solomon and Daniel. The “wonderful works” is the same expression as that applied to Elisha. And “tribe” as a description of the Christians is used for the Jewish “race” and other groups. Such words identify these sections of the Testimonium as original and authentic to Josephus.

Naturally, the suggestion has been made that such features are deliberately used by the Christian interpolator to make his passage look authentic. Since the object of the exercise is to fool the reader into thinking that this is so, it is hardly unreasonable—and certainly not “more than a little silly,” as Kirby labels it—to suggest such an explanation. Guignebert (p.17) says: “It may be admitted that the style of Josephus has been cleverly imitated, a not very difficult matter.” A copyist transcribing Josephus for months on end would not have to work very hard to effect such an imitation—indeed, it might almost come second nature.

It is further objected that the clearly Christian phrases contain no such distinguishing Josephan vocabulary, but this is hardly surprising. When the interpolator is constructing those elements for which Josephus elsewhere contains similar ideas, such as “wise man” and “tribe” in the sense of a group, he has precedents to draw on. But when he gets to “rising on the third day,” this is a uniquely Christian idea. The rest of the acknowledged Christian parts don't offer much in the way of opportunities for Josephan characteristics, either. As for “receiving the truth,” I haven't checked thoroughly, but I somehow doubt that the down-to-earth and pragmatic mind of Josephus ever turned its attention, much less its expectation, to uncovering such a thing.

Kirby suggests that in view of the ‘erudition’ required to construct this false passage, it does not square with the naivete embodied in including the “obviously bogus” phrase, “he was the Messiah.” But as I have indicated, a copyist working for a long time with the texts does not need to be “erudite” to perform a moderately successful imitation, and the latter is quite compatible with naivete. Indeed, naivete was a standard characteristic of all the early Fathers. The learned historian Eusebius, after all, as well as every Christian commentator for the next 13 centuries, accepted unquestioningly the entire Testimonium Flavianum, along with its declaration that Jesus “was the Messiah.” Of course, they swallowed a lot worse than that.

On the other hand, one could speculate, as Kirby does, that the interpolator actually wrote “he was believed to be the Messiah,” which survives in Jerome's version and amid a more reworked Arabic recension. Kirby is probably right in not being able to envision a Christian copyist watering down the pure phrase, though he takes the Jerome version as part of the Josephus original. The naivete would then be the responsibility of a later stage of revision, by a scribe who couldn't let the non-committal earlier phrase stand.

Thus I would say that the standard objections to the Testimonium being a total Christian construction, based on the style and intention of the writing, are definitely inconclusive.

14. The short extent of the Testimonium - Another standard argument is that if a Christian had constructed this passage entirely, he would not have limited himself to something so short to describe the career of his Savior. This can easily be disposed of, for the same argument would have to apply to the one who supposedly added the extra elements to the presumed original. Why didn't he make them longer? The situation is not the same as the one dealt with earlier, where any kind of insertion longer than a phrase or so couldn't have been fitted into the *Antiquities* 20 passage about James' death. Here we have a digressional paragraph which interrupts the flow of the context in any case, so no impediment stood in the way of a scribe enlarging on a Josephus original, to whatever extent he wished.

So why *didn't* the one who constructed the entire Testimonium indulge himself at greater length? I don't presume to know. Perhaps he was running out of energy (or light) at the end of a long day. Perhaps it was his last codex sheet and the shop didn't reopen until Monday. My facetiousness is designed simply to point out, again, those mundane circumstances that may accompany any aspect of an historical enquiry, ones we cannot hope to uncover and whose existence always stands in danger of being lost sight of.

The objection, therefore, is at best inconclusive.

15. Interrupting contexts - G. A. Wells and others have argued that the continuity of the flanking passages works best when no passage about Jesus intervenes. The final thought of the previous paragraph flows naturally into the words of the one following, whereas the opening of the latter paragraph does not fit as a follow-up to the closing sentence of the Testimonium. This argument is somewhat tempered by the fact that since the ancients had no concept of footnotes, digressional material had to be inserted into the main text, as there was nowhere else to put it. However, one might ask whether the Testimonium should be considered digressional material, since it continues with the theme of Pilate's activities and about various woes which befall the Jews. One might also suggest that, digression or no, once Josephus had written it, his opening words in the subsequent paragraph ought to have reflected, rather than ignored, the paragraph on Jesus.

16. What did Josephus know about Christianity? - Supporters of the 'authentic core' position point out that the reconstructed passage contains virtually no Gospel elements; in fact, there are features which would tend to be contradictory of the Gospels. The miracles are only "wonderful works"—no healings, exorcisms or feats over nature are specified. The reference to the Jews in "upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us," doesn't reflect the rabid Gospel portrayal of the evil Jewish establishment which hounded and plotted against Jesus, arrested him and shoved him under an unwilling Pilate's nose demanding the death penalty. In fact, the text identifies Pilate as the one who "had condemned him to the cross." Even the part about "winning over many Greeks" is not strictly based on the Gospels, which have no account of Jesus actually preaching to non-Jews; and although he occasionally reacts favorably to gentiles who approach him, he can also forbid his disciples to go to "swine".

Such observations are certainly legitimate. But they can in many cases be diluted. At the end of Matthew, Jesus directs his apostles to preach to all nations, and an interpolator might incorporate the spirit of this into the reference to winning over Greeks. Especially so in a gentile community where, regardless of what the Gospels did or did not say, it is almost inevitable that a tradition would have developed that Jesus had preached to and won over gentiles. Nor is it a foregone conclusion that a scribe would primarily base his interpolation on his familiarity with the

Gospels and their specific details, especially as he is trying to mimic Josephus' own tone and vocabulary. He would hardly think it appropriate to have Josephus paint his own countrymen as wretchedly as do the Gospels. He is also inserting his passage into an account by Josephus of the misfortunes suffered by the innocent Jewish people under a reprehensible Pilate, so a passage which whitewashed the governor and demonized the Jews in the death of Jesus, such as we find in the Gospels, would stick out like a sore thumb. In any case, even in the Gospels it is Pilate who sends Jesus to the cross, not the Jews, so there is no 'inaccuracy' in the reference as it stands.

In this connection, another problem arises in trying to accept the reconstructed original. Without the "Christian insertions," Josephus says nothing about a reputed resurrection of Jesus. James H. Charlesworth, as quoted by Kirby, claims that the removed sections make for an original whose flow, grammatically and otherwise, is "improved and smoother" (*Jesus Within Judaism*, p.93-94) and he specifically points to the flanking elements of the crucifixion insertion, thus offering no possibility that Josephus had included a reference, perhaps derogatory, to a belief in Christ's resurrection.

But how likely is it that Josephus (a) would have been ignorant of this element of Christian belief, or (b) would have left it out? Josephus may not himself have known any Gospels, but if he knew that Jesus was a "wise man" who had taught, if he knew he had performed "wonderful works," if he knew the basic facts surrounding the crucifixion, it is inconceivable that he would have been ignorant of the central claim of the Christian faith, that this man crucified by Pilate had risen from his grave three days later. Even the "non-Christian source" posited by Meier would hardly have left this out. And if Josephus felt impelled to include for his readers any report about a messianic pretender who had given rise to a "tribe" that persisted "to this day," he would surely have wanted to inform them of this tribe's outlandish belief that their founder had walked out of his tomb. I can think of no motivation for Josephus to leave it out purposely. Simply reporting it would not have cast any aspersions on his own credulity. The supposed absence of this element seriously undermines the standard reconstruction of a Josephus original.

Witness to the Testimonium Flavianum

17. Silence on the Testimonium by the Church Fathers - Before addressing the biggest problem of all, I will consider the question of the lack of Christian witness to any version of the Testimonium Flavianum before Eusebius in the early 4th century. Defenders of a Josephus original realize that this requires explanation. For it is a surprising fact that not a single writer before Eusebius, not Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, not Origen, Tertullian, the prolific Cyprian and Arnobius, along with many others, in all their discussions of how the outside world viewed Christians and the figure of Jesus, in all their defences against pagan hostility, nevertheless make not the slightest reference to Josephus' account of this "wise man" who had "performed many wonderful works," who "won over many Jews and gentiles," who was perhaps a "teacher of the truth," one who was denounced by the (long despised) Jewish leaders, crucified by Pilate but who enjoyed so much love and support from his followers that their numbers grew and their devotion had "continued to this day." It must be admitted that this silence is incredible. It is, *per se*, a damning piece of evidence against the claim that any part of the Testimonium Flavianum could have been present before Eusebius in Christian copies of the works of Josephus.

The common rejoinder that there was no need for all these Christian commentators to make reference to a description which contained all the above elements voiced by a non-Christian is inherently implausible. A moment's unbiased consideration must show that. There is so much in this "neutral" account that Christians could have "put a spin on" in defense of themselves and

Jesus, so much that could have given succor, support and even ammunition in much of what the Christian apologists were attempting to do in their writing. Origen alone spent a quarter of a million words contending against Celsus, drawing on all sorts of proofs and witnesses to the arguments he makes, including referring to Josephus, yet we are to believe that not once did a single element of this almost glowing description of Jesus by the famous Jewish historian commend itself for mention.

To give one specific example. In Book I, chapters 46, 67 and 68 of *Contra Celsum*, Origen reports that Celsus had disparaged the miracles of Jesus, accusing Jesus of having learned his wonder-working tricks from the Egyptians. Origen counters this by claiming that Jesus' deeds were superior to anything contained in the Greek myths, and that Jesus performed his miracles in order to win people over to his commendable ethical teachings, something no Egyptian trickster could emulate. An appeal here to the declaration by Josephus, a respected Jewish historian, that Jesus had been a "wise man" who performed "wonderful works," would have served to place Jesus and his miracles in the favorable light in which Origen is trying to cast them.

Thus Jeff Lowder's claim that the original account of Josephus "would not have been very useful" (<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/jury/chap5.html>) does not commend itself. There was so little comment to be found in any pagan writing about Christianity which was not condemnatory (consider Tacitus' "haters of mankind"), derisive (Lucian's ridicule of Christian beliefs in *The Death of Peregrinus*), or adversarial (Celsus' attack on Christianity which prompted half a lifetime's work by Origen on a rebuttal), I challenge anyone to read through the reconstructed Josephus original and say that they can seriously entertain the notion that every single Christian apologist for over two centuries would regard not a single element of it as worthy of mention. Indeed, if memory hasn't failed me, the reconstructed *Testimonium* would probably be the sole example of a non-negative comment on Christianity by an outsider until Constantine's conversion. And yet we are to assume that it held no use or appeal?

As in the case of the New Testament epistles' silence on a human Jesus, it is the totality of the silence that is most damning, for it must posit that the suggested motives for the silence are to be applied not to one individual (something conceivable) but to every single individual in many situations, many places, and over a long period of time. Such things don't happen in history and go against common sense.

John Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, p.79) offers a questionable explanation for the blanket silence. Meier's argument is that the Christian Fathers would recognize that Josephus' testimony showed that he didn't accept Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, or believed that he had risen from the dead; it testified to Josephus' unbelief and was therefore avoided. Should the apologists have found this surprising or disconcerting in a non-Christian? They dealt with unbelief every day, faced it head on, tried to counter and even win over the opponent. Justin's major work, *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho*, did just that. Origen, in his own tackling of Celsus, didn't shy away from criticizing Josephus for not identifying the right person's death as the reason for Jerusalem's fall, or from pointing out that he didn't believe in Jesus as the Messiah. It hardly seems that the silence on *Antiquities* 18.3.3 by all before Eusebius can be explained by such a line of reasoning.

And what of that latter statement by Origen, that Josephus did not accept Jesus as the Christ? It is often claimed that this constitutes an oblique reference to an original *Testimonium* which was silent on such a thing. But rather than assume that Josephus' *silence* on the matter would impel Origen's comment, we should look for some *positive* statement in Josephus which might lead Origen to his conclusion. And in fact we have such a statement in *Jewish War* 6.5.4, where Josephus declares that the Jewish messianic prophecies were really about the victorious emperor

Vespasian. This statement alone would have been sufficient to prompt Origen's comment that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

Authorship of the Testimonium Flavianum

18. Could Josephus have written the reconstructed Testimonium? - This leads me to the most significant set of arguments against the validity of the reconstructed Josephus original. Could Josephus under any circumstances have written even the reduced version?

Jeff Lowder admits in his essay that if Josephus had said anything overtly hostile about Jesus or Christians, "Origen would probably have singled it out for rebuke." This observation is certainly valid, and it precludes any fallback position that Josephus could have had an entirely different reference to Jesus, one that was hostile, in *Antiquities* 18.3.3, and that a Christian copyist removed it completely, replacing it with the one we see now.

It would seem, then, that Josephus had to work within a very narrow window of expression to give us the situation we find, namely that nobody mentions the passage one way or the other. But we must ask, whatever would have led Josephus to express himself on Jesus within such a fine range: neither praising nor condemning, neither hostile nor friendly, but tiptoeing past the apologists on a completely neutral, middle ground—if we could even view the reconstructed passage in such a light?

For the fact of the matter is, the whole tenor of the Josephan "original" *does not ring true for Josephus!* In the case of every other would-be messiah or popular leader opposed to or executed by the Romans, he has nothing but evil to say. Indeed, as I've quoted above, he condemns the whole movement of popular agitators and orators as the bane of the century, leading to the destruction of the Temple, of the city, of the Jewish state. It is virtually impossible that he could make some kind of exception, some distinction for this "Jesus" to whom he devotes so little space.

On what basis would he do so? If Josephus had possessed an intimate knowledge of Jesus, leading to some favorable estimation of the man that was markedly different from his usual attitude toward such figures, we would expect much more than the cursory account in *Antiquities* 18. The latter, in fact, amounts to little more than a bare summation of basic Gospel elements. In any case, most commentators conclude that Josephus had little familiarity with Christianity, so such an explanation would have to be discounted. Would Jewish sources have provided a favorable account of Jesus' teachings or activities? Hardly, and certainly not by the 90s, when Jewish leaders were laying anathemas on the Christians. Jeff Lowder raises the possibility that Josephus' information came from "official Roman records," but such a record would hardly have presented Jesus in any positive fashion, nor even a neutral one.

Why, then, would Josephus have made an exception for Jesus? Did he have reports of Jesus' teachings, all of which he perceived as laudable? That is difficult to envision. By the late 1st century, if we can judge by the Gospels and even scholarly reconstructions of Q, any commendable teachings of Jesus were inextricably mixed up with all sorts of inflammatory and subversive pronouncements and prophecies of a revolutionary and apocalyptic nature (whether authentic to Jesus or not). The latter would have been an expression of the very thing Josephus hated and condemned in all the other popular and executed agitators of the period. It would be difficult to postulate a situation in which his knowledge of Jesus the "teacher" could have been so selective as to screen out the objectionable elements that would have been attached to him as well. Even within the teachings which we today regard as commendable, including ones which critical scholars such as the Jesus Seminar judge to be authentic, there were 'counter-culture'

sentiments which would have struck Josephus and his patrons as subversive, things like the poor inheriting the earth (which implies the overthrow of established authority), or pronouncements that openly condemned the Jewish leaders who cooperated with Roman rule. Thus we are justified in concluding that *it is impossible that Josephus could have referred to Jesus as "a wise man."*

When we get to the phrase, "(he was) a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure," which Kirby and Meier and even Crossan (*The Historical Jesus*, p.373) regard as authentic, the claim for authenticity becomes intolerable, for how can anyone believe that Josephus would consider referring to a Jesus to whom all the various Christian expressions and expectations were attached (including the destruction of the world) as a "teacher of the truth"?

And what of the phrase "a doer of wonderful works"? Or even translating this as the less starry-eyed "startling works"? This in Josephus' mind would put Jesus into the same class as those popular agitators like Theudas the magician who promised to divide the river Jordan so that his followers could cross over it, or the unnamed Egyptian who claimed that his command would knock down the walls of Jerusalem. Would Christian or any other reports filter out the healings (which Josephus might conceivably accept as believable or laudatory) from Jesus' reputed miracles over nature, or his Gospel prophecy that the walls of the Temple would tumble?

The very presence in the Testimonium of the phrase "wonderful works" indicates that some of Josephus' report would have been based on traditions about miracle-working by Jesus. This rules out a 'private pipeline' to some authentic picture of an enlightened sage. Instead, it opens the door to the possibility of a wide range of reports about dramatic and even revolutionary acts by Jesus, such as we find in both Q and the Gospels: working miracles in front of large crowds, challenging and condemning the religious authorities, or causing an uproar in the Temple. (If the story of the cleansing of the Temple were factual, such an incident would not have escaped Josephus knowledge, nor his reporting.) Factual or not, if such traditions were circulating about Jesus, this from Josephus' point of view would have brought him into association with the Zealotic rebels, bandits and general crazies who had infested the land of Israel prior to the great War and were most responsible for its devastating ruin. Could the historian have presented this Jesus in even a "neutral" way, could he have regarded him in any other light than just another detestable fanatic?

Taken as a whole, again to judge by the Christians' own record in the Gospels and even some of the epistles, "the tribe of the Christians" toward the end of the 1st century was still a strongly apocalyptic one, one that expected the overthrow of the empire and established authority and the transformation of the world into God's Kingdom. Nothing in Josephus' situation would have led him to divorce this prevailing Christian outlook from his judgment of the movement's founder. Those fundamental apocalyptic doctrines it held, which Christians themselves would have declared were part of Jesus' own pronouncements, could not possibly have escaped him if he so much as knew of the sect's existence.

The report in Tacitus, the persecution witnessed in Pliny's letter to Trajan, the *birkat ha-minim* (curse on the heretics) of the Jewish synagogues after Jamnia, all testify to the hostility and vilification which Christian sects endured at the time. On what basis would Josephus buck such a trend? Through what channels would he receive a favorable report on Jesus that could override all this and that he would accept? Even if he were conversant with Christians, would he be inclined to choose their word over the prevailing opinion—a word which, in any case, would hardly filter out all the things Josephus would inevitably react against? Would he imply approval or even a touch of admiration for this Christian tribe by saying that "those who had loved him

previously did not cease to do so?” I once referred to the distilled Testimonium as still “too warm and snuggly” and I stand by that evaluation.

19. Did Josephus draw on old personal memories? - Lest it occur to the reader that there might be an ‘out’ in all this, let me address it here. Could Josephus have set aside all the negative traditions (from his point of view) that were current about Jesus and the Christians, and relied instead on personal memories from his pre-War days in Judea and Galilee? Might we presume that the idealized picture painted by those modern scholars who have excavated a “genuine” Jesus from Q1 is essentially correct, and that Jesus had been an enlightened, Cynic-style sage who never breathed a word about apocalyptic destruction or the Son of Man? Was Josephus’ evaluation based on first-hand, remembered contact with early Christians who had followed such a sage? (He was born in Palestine in 37 CE.)

I have never encountered anyone in this debate who alleges that Josephus had such contact with or knowledge of earliest Christianity. In fact, not having been aware of painting themselves into the corner I have outlined, scholars have rejected such a thing. Again, rightly so. Those personal memories would have had to be very strong and very positive for Josephus to have trusted them and allowed them to override all the negativity which became attached to the Christian name. This would hardly have been likely. Josephus was of a priestly family, and he never gives any indication of having had contact with Christian circles. One can even assume that there would have been some negativity felt toward Jesus and Christians in the Jewish circles he did move in, as witness (from Paul) the persecution certain early Christian communities were subjected to.

In addition, with all due respect to the Jesus Seminar and various new questers, that Jesus could actually have been such a paragon as to create this strong, positive and lasting impression in one who was not a follower and who had never met him personally, is also highly unlikely. Nor is it likely that the Christian movement in the 50s, let’s say, when Josephus might have formed such an impression, was free of all objectionable elements. The paragon picture, in any case, is compromised by the phrase “doer of wonderful works,” which automatically brings in elements which Josephus would have regarded as negative.

But the overriding consideration is that if Josephus were drawing on such early, personal memories, he would be presenting a picture of Jesus which went against the general view of Christianity by outsiders at the time he was writing, as well as against the principles and outlook he elsewhere expresses toward those things which would have been associated with the Christian sect and founder. If, *under any circumstances*, Josephus were making this kind of exception for Jesus, he would hardly have done so without a word of explanation, without an account of how this particular executed messianic agitator was unlike the rest. And it would have had to be in decidedly positive terms which a Christian would never have deleted or ignored. He would have spent more than three “neutral” sentences on the man.

20. Josephus was writing for the Establishment - The final point to be stressed is that Josephus was writing under Roman and Flavian sponsorship. His readers were primarily Roman, some Jewish. He certainly was not writing for Christians. What reason would he have had for being, in Meier’s phrase, “purposely ambiguous”? He had nothing to fear from Christians, and no reason to consider their sensibilities. Regardless of what he may have thought about the character of Pilate, if Pilate had executed Jesus, then there had to be—in official Roman and Flavian eyes—a justification for doing so. Crucifixion was a punishment for rebels, and Jesus’ crucifixion would have been seen as part of Rome’s ongoing campaign to deal with the problems of a troubled time and province.

Yet how, in the reconstructed Testimonium, does Josephus deal with the event? The words and their context give the impression that it was due to “an accusation made by men of the highest standing among us,” the execution of a wise and loved man, a teacher of truth who was obviously innocent—a Gospel image if there ever was one. Was Pilate thereby duped? The Roman governor forced to do something reprehensible? There could be no basis on which Josephus would be led to interpret the event this way, much less put it in writing for a Roman audience. Again, there would have been no channel through which such a judgment would have come to him that he would have accepted. And no way he could have avoided explaining himself if he did.

In his *Life* (65/363), Josephus declares that the emperor Titus himself “affixed his own signature to them [copies of the original Greek edition of the *Jewish War*] and gave orders for their publication.” Josephus wrote at the behest of his Flavian patrons. Their motives were his motives. The official Roman outlook was largely his own outlook, at least where the War and the events which led up to it were concerned. The Testimonium Flavianum, in any version, makes no sense within such a Josephan world picture.

Thus Meier’s claim (*A Marginal Jew*, p.63) that, “this summary description of Jesus is conceivable in the mouth of a Jew who is not openly hostile to him” cannot be accepted and contravenes any rational standard of historical criticism. It may not be easy to uncover the mind or situation of the Christian interpolator who composed this passage in its entirety, with its curious amalgam of understated, off-the-Gospel-mark, imitative elements. But it is far easier to postulate such a thing, than it is to impute to a mind we essentially do know, in circumstances we do understand, a piece of writing which would contravene every principle Josephus stood for, every view he elsewhere expresses, every influence we can safely say must have operated upon him.

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Supplement: from the text of *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin With a Mythical Christ?*

21. The Galilean vs. the Pauline Jesus - In any location outside Palestine and Syria, all the evidence concerning Christianity in the latter first century relates to the cultic expression of the Pauline type. Here Jesus is the cosmic Son of God, creator and sustainer of the universe, source of salvation through his death and resurrection. That evidence, as we have seen from writings like the pseudo-Pauline epistles, 1 Clement, Revelation, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Odes of Solomon, has nothing to say about the Galilean side of things, about the ministry as portrayed in the Gospels—nor about Jesus’ death under Pilate.

If we can assume that Josephus, writing in the 90s, would reflect views of Jesus current in Rome at that time, how do we explain the fact that his "original" Testimonium says nothing about the cultic Christ of Paul, the redemptive Son of God who was an exalted divinity? Such cosmic descriptions and claims about the Son as are found in the first century epistles would have been a part of the Christian ethos which Josephus was exposed to. (Paul addresses the Roman congregation in those terms, indicating that this is the way Roman Christians regarded Jesus. 1 Clement, written in Rome and contemporary with Josephus, speaks in similar terms about the spiritual Christ.)

If Christians were going about talking of their founder in terms familiar to us from the epistles, this elevation of a crucified criminal to the very status of divine Son of the God of Abraham would hardly have been ignored by Josephus. For Josephus was intimately concerned with his Jewish heritage, its traditions and beliefs. The natural affront to Jewish sensibilities in the

fundamental Christian doctrine about Jesus, its blasphemous association of a human man with God and the bestowing on him of all God's divine titles, would have received the closest attention from the historian, and inevitably his condemnation.

Nothing in the "authentic" Testimonium breathes a whisper of the Pauline Son of God. Instead, it sets its sights no higher than the Gospel-like picture of a remarkable sage who was crucified and gave rise to a new movement. With the addition of the resurrection, this is essentially Mark's amalgamation of Q with a passion narrative. This absence of any dimension relating to the cultic Christ is further evidence that the Testimonium is a product of second or third century Christian outlook, one in which the Gospel picture predominates, while the earlier cosmic Christ has receded into the shadows behind it.

In regard to the Jesus of Q, there are two ways of looking at the question. One is that if Josephus is writing history—however briefly—and the Jesus he is addressing was the founder (under whatever name) of a movement as extensive as the record makes it out to be, from Galilee through Syria, this should be reflected in what Josephus says. If Jesus had inaugurated a widespread counter-culture movement which prophesied the end of the world and delivered an innovative philosophy of life, and Josephus knew of him in that role—even if not to the extent of knowing what was "genuine" to this teacher—that role should have been reflected in the original Testimonium. Instead, the Jesus described there is simply an isolated figure, a "wise man" and a miracle worker. Apart from the difficulties in regarding this as Josephus' own evaluation, such an account would scarcely have done justice to the man who had presumably set so much in motion. (In the absence of a known founder figure, Josephus' silence on the subject of the movement itself may be understandable.)

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The authenticity of the reconstructed Testimonium Flavianum in *Antiquities* 18.3.3 is untenable. Historical "knowledge" is based not on mathematical proof, but on weight of probability produced by the documentary or archaeological record and the rational deductions we can make from it. If the weight of the arguments offered in this article is to be dismissed without thorough consideration, then dissenters to the mythicist position are not dealing in unbiased historical evaluation. At the very least, it must be acknowledged that Josephus collapses as reliable evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus.

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Here in summary (following the numbered headings in the text) is the balance of the argument, relating to *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.3:

13. Josephan phrases and vocabulary in the Testimonium - It is not unreasonable that an interpolator would try (and successfully) to mimic Josephus by using language characteristic of him. Nor is it incompatible with the naivete of introducing blatant Christian doctrine, although the direct "he was the Messiah" may come from a second stage of interpolation.

14. The short extent of the Testimonium - If it is claimed that a Christian constructing the entire passage would have waxed about Jesus at greater length, so would someone adding elements to it, since the paragraph was a digression from the context anyway. We can't know why the interpolator kept it so short.

15. Interrupting contexts - This traditional argument against authenticity, that the Testimonium interrupts a natural flow of wording and content from the preceding to the following paragraphs,

is admittedly not foolproof, since digressions within the text were unavoidable and took the place of modern footnotes. Yet the paragraph on Jesus is not entirely a digression, and its presence should have been reflected in the adjacent wordings of the flanking passages.

16. What did Josephus know about Christianity? - If the reconstructed passage contains no Gospel elements (which is certainly debatable), considerations of context could be one reason. And since the “original” would have contained no reference to the resurrection, which Josephus would hardly have been ignorant of and deliberately left out, its authenticity is undermined.

17. Silence on the Testimonium by the Church Fathers - The silence on the Testimonium by all before Eusebius cannot be adequately explained, since even its so-called neutral content would have been appealing and useful to the apologists. The totality of the silence is damning. Origen’s declaration that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah could have been prompted by the view he read in *Jewish War* 6.5.4 that Vespasian had been the object of the messianic prophecies.

18. Could Josephus have written the reconstructed Testimonium? - The reconstructed original cannot be assigned to Josephus, since it contradicts what he says about all the other messianic agitators. There is no source or basis from which he would have made an exception for Jesus, and the apocalyptic and revolutionary elements associated with Jesus and the Christian movement, as well as the miracle traditions, would have precluded it. Josephus would have had no reason to buck the current hostile attitude toward Christians.

19. Did Josephus draw on old personal memories? - There is no evidence that Josephus in his youth had any contact with Christians, and unlikely that it would have produced convictions about Jesus to override all the negativity attached to him later. If such a thing had happened, he would have created a much longer, more positive description of Jesus.

20. Josephus was writing for the Establishment - His Roman audience and Flavian sponsors would not have accepted that Jesus had been crucified unjustly, and certainly not without an explanation on Josephus’ part.

21. (Supplement) The Galilean vs. the Pauline Jesus - Even though Christians in Rome would have held a belief in Jesus as the cosmic Son of God, a crucified man elevated to divinity, Josephus makes no mention of such a doctrine, one he as a Jew would have found blasphemous and objectionable, and another negative mark against Jesus. Instead, the Testimonium reflects a later Gospel outlook, in which the Pauline type of Christ has receded into the background. Josephus is also silent on Jesus as the founder of a widespread (as we see from the record) Kingdom of God preaching movement.

— **Effect on Antiquities 20** - As promised at the end of Part II, if the above arguments seriously undermine the feasibility of accepting any core of the Testimonium in *Antiquities* 18 as authentic to Josephus, this has fatal repercussions on the other reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20. Reversing a common argument, if Josephus did not deal with Jesus earlier in the text, it is unlikely that he could have authored the phrase attached to James, “the brother of Jesus, the one called (the) Christ”, since “the one” would have implied a previous reference. The reader would be left wondering just who this Jesus was. (The Christian interpolator was not so perceptive.)

Final Conclusion

Although it may well be that we owe Josephus' survival through the Middle Ages to the unknown Christian interpolator who gave us the Testimonium, it is time to release Josephus from his Christian captivity—and from the bonds of those who continue to claim him as a witness to the existence of an historical Jesus. But if the weight of argument would impel us to acknowledge that Josephus seems to have made no reference at all to Jesus, what implications do we draw from this?

Here is a Jewish historian who was born and grew up in Judea shortly after Pilate's tumultuous governorship, with its presumed crucifixion of a Jewish sage and wonder worker, a man whose followers claimed had risen from the dead and who gave rise to a vital new religious sect. Here is an historian who remembers and records in his work with staggering efficiency and in voluminous detail the events and personalities and socio-political subtleties of eight decades and more. Can we believe that Josephus would have been ignorant of this teaching revolutionary and the empire-wide movement he produced, or that for some unfathomable reason he chose to omit Jesus from his chronicles?

Destroying the credibility of the Josephus references inevitably places a very strong nail in the coffin of the historical Jesus.

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The essay on "Flavius Josephus" by Peter Kirby can be found at the following address:

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/testimonium.html>

Revelation

The Gospel According to the Prophet John

I: Jesus Christ In The Book Of Revelation

On a Dark Aegean Isle

From Palestine and Syria there were several routes one could follow to reach the capital of the Roman Empire. One was by sea along the lower coast of Asia Minor and into the Aegean. At a point partway up toward Ephesus lay the small island of Patmos. To this isolated spot sometime in the latter first century, a prophet named John, who "had preached God's word and borne my testimony to Jesus," was banished by the Roman authorities. Here he underwent certain visionary experiences and penned the most famous apocalypse of all, now residing as the final document in the Christian canon, the Book of Revelation.

That this prophet and writer was the Apostle John found in the Gospels is an ancient view no longer held. Literary analysis shows as well that he was not the same author as any of those who wrote the Johannine epistles or the Fourth Gospel (John). Whether he is to be identified with the so-called "John the Elder" (or Seer) whose tomb is found at Ephesus and who may be the elder referred to by Papias, is unknown.

What form of Christianity is represented by Revelation? The book inhabits the fevered world of Jewish apocalyptic. John owes a huge debt to the Old Testament Book of Daniel, whose fantastic visions of the End-time he has borrowed and enlarged upon, reaching new horrific and punitive heights. John has also taken the famous figure from the vision of Daniel 7, the "one like a son of man," and if Revelation was written in 68 or 69 CE, as some suggest, this would be the earliest known adaptation of the Danielic figure in either Jewish or Christian writings (outside of the reconstructed Q, if the Q2 stratum of prophetic sayings were to be dated earlier). But Revelation also inhabits the world of Christ belief, for the figure of "Jesus Christ" is central, and to him have been attached a number of symbolic motifs and titles belonging to Jewish and Christian messianic expectation.

An Exclusively Heavenly Christ

Yet what sort of Christ is this? Revelation opens with these words:

"This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his servants what must soon take place, and he [i.e., Christ] sent it through his angel to his servant John who, telling everything he saw, has borne witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." (1:1-2)

God makes a revelation to Jesus, who in turn communicates it through an angel to the prophet John. John, in setting it all down in writing, bears witness to God's revelation and to the one transmitting it. This is as close as Revelation gets to any idea of a teaching Jesus—which is to say, not at all. The figure of Christ communicates entirely through spiritual channels, and with the exception of 3:3 (see below), nothing that this figure says bears any resemblance to the words of Jesus as spoken in the Gospels. For the author of Revelation, Christ is an entirely heavenly figure. As 1:1-2 makes clear, Christ is a spiritual intermediary between God and humanity.

There is little if anything in Revelation to suggest that the writer views his Christ as having been incarnated to earth. We know he envisions him as having died and risen, for Christ is said to have been "dead and came to life again" (2:8). But the circumstances of this dying and rising are never given. Even the concept of "rising" may be too strong, for no idea of a bodily resurrection is ever introduced. Such things belong to the world of the spirit and myth. John's Christ is equated with the "Lamb," one who was slain and has triumphed, again without an earthly setting specified. He is also equated with the Danielic "one like a son of man." These are apocalyptic and messianic motifs longstanding in Jewish thought; in that milieu, both are heavenly figures.

The same exclusively heavenly venue is allotted to the child of chapter 12, born to the "woman robed with the sun." In the writer's vision, this child is immediately snatched up to heaven by God to escape the clutches of a dragon (=Satan), there to await the outcome of great celestial upheavals. John gives no inkling that this child has undergone a life on earth (despite scholars' claims that this is "implied"), much less that he had a teaching ministry, or performed a sacrificial act, which latter is in any case allotted to the Lamb. And the elements of the woman/child vision are heavily dependent on hellenistic mythology, making the identification of the child with John's Christ vague at best. However, the relationships between the various prophetic motifs and characters in Revelation is generally a murky one, a feature which tends to be characteristic of most apocalyptic writing, and I will return later to this point and to the woman and child of chapter 12.

A Pierced Messiah

Let's look more closely at some of the things said of Christ in Revelation. Does 1:7 make an allusion to Jesus' Gospel prophecy (Mark 13:26, 14:62 and parallels) and to the historical crucifixion?

"Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him, and among them those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse."

For the source of these pronouncements we need look no further than scripture. The clouds motif is lifted from Daniel 7 whose "one like a son of man" comes with the clouds of heaven (7:13). The rest of the verse is a close adaptation of Zechariah 12:10b:

"Then they shall look upon (me, on) him whom they have pierced, and shall wail over him as over an only child, and shall grieve for him bitterly as for a first-born son."

The identical juxtaposition in both documents of the two ideas of piercing and grieving makes it certain that Zechariah is the source of Revelation's idea, not the story of Jesus of Nazareth. There is, in fact, a lot to be gleaned from this passage. First, we realize that we are once again in a milieu of faith which has derived its inspiration and information from scripture. Christ and the features that have been given to him are a product of the study of the sacred writings, not a record of history. Second, we are in a type of Christ belief related to Paul's antecedents, the more primitive circles he built upon: these viewed Christ's sacrifice not as a universal atonement, but as a paradigmatic experience mirroring Israel's own and entailing guarantees of exaltation for the elect whom Christ represents. (I'll examine this idea of paradigm shortly.)

The original passage in Zechariah, critical scholars are largely agreed (see the discussion in the Anchor Bible, *Zechariah*, p.336-342, and *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p.751: "Some reference to apparent persecution and resulting mourning, as that has been caused by the Davidic house, is introduced in 12:10."), alluded to something now lost to us, in that the rulers in Jerusalem, on the day of the Lord ("that day"), will feel pity for someone they have previously persecuted and

"pierced," probably a prophet, someone whom they shall grieve over "as for a first-born son." But to a later age reading it (they too would have lost sight of the original allusion), this passage would have suggested some pregnant ideas. The Hebrew actually has "they shall look on *me* whom they have pierced"—which later Greek translations 'corrected' to "on him," to bring it into line with the pronouns "him" in the rest of the verse. The original wording may have suggested that the Lord was saying that he himself had been the object of the piercing. While the Septuagint, in light of this, seems to have chosen to interpret the Hebrew verb as meaning "mock" instead of "pierce" (for God himself could hardly be spoken of as having been pierced), others, under the influence of current philosophical ideas, might have read into this a reference to a subordinate heavenly figure—in fact, a "Son," since the final phrase of the verse uses this very simile, "first-born son." Without going into all the possible niceties of interpretation which this verse could have been subjected to in the hothouse of the period's immersion in scripture, we can say that passages of the sort like Zechariah 12:10 could well have been a principal source of Revelation's idea of the Christ who was pierced, the Lamb who was slain.

Indeed, such passages were probably the source of the concept in early cultic Christianity that the spiritual Christ had been crucified (in the spirit realm, to which scripture gave a view). Isaiah 53:7, interpreted messianically, told of the "sheep that was led to the slaughter." The sacrificial lamb was a symbol deeply imbedded in Jewish tradition, going back through countless Passovers to the Exodus legend. As for the conquering Lamb, this too is a motif to be found in Jewish apocalyptic, as reflected in the Testament of Joseph (19:8), part of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. (See *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, vol.1, p.824.)

A Paradigm Without Mercy

That the Christ of Revelation plays a paradigmatic role is supported by the book as a whole. In the opening sections of my Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ As "Man", I discuss the essentials of myth in the ancient world and the principle of "paradigm." Here, heavenly savior figures are seen to undergo experiences in the upper spiritual realm which parallel, and have parallel consequences for, those of believers/initiates on earth who are joined to them in sacramental ways. This is the concept which lay behind the Graeco-Roman mystery cults, of which early Christianity was a Hellenistic-Jewish expression. But in its 'pre-Pauline' form (continuing even after Paul), this paradigmatic principle existed in its original 'pure' state, one we see in Revelation. Whereas Paul envisioned the possibility of something resembling a universal salvation, including the eventual conversion of all the Jews to Christ, no such merciful universalism is present in John the prophet's mind.

Although in 1:5 John says that Christ "freed us from our sins with his life's blood," this is not a universal salvation. The "us," as he goes on to say, is a select group, "a royal house who will serve as the priest of his God and Father." The peoples of the world who "lament in remorse" are not saved, despite some commentators' attempts to twist the writer's words throughout the book into such an implication. In fact, the implication that does come across in Revelation is the parallel between the slain Lamb, whom the world will regret having pierced, and the persecuted believer, the suffering elect of Israel whom the people of the world have also pierced. These latter people will definitely rue the mistreatment they have meted out when they are visited by war, slaughter and assorted destruction accompanying the end of the world. As the hymn to God in 11:17-18 says:

"The day of retribution has come. . . . Now is the time for recompense to thy servants the prophets, to thy dedicated people, and all who honor thy name."

This "recompense" is part of the parallel between the Lamb and the suffering elect, for both will have shared in a future glorification which is a direct consequence of their own suffering. The paean to the Lamb in 5:12 says:

"Worthy is the Lamb, the Lamb that was slain, to receive all power and wealth, wisdom and might, honor and glory and praise."

First of all, given the writer's dependence on Daniel, it is certain that he intends this in the same way that the "one like a son of man" is promised such things in Daniel 7, where he stands for the saints of Israel. They shall, like him, receive from God "sovereignty and glory and kingly power . . . so that all people and nations of every language should serve him" (Dan. 7:14). But the advance that Revelation's Lamb has made over the Danielic figure is that he is worthy of his reward because he was slain, an idea the writer of Daniel never thought of, or at least did not voice. The parallel extends to the people of long suffering Israel or her pious elect, persecuted and slain by the godless and immoral Babylon, which for the prophet and his contemporaries stands for Rome and her predecessors in conquest. Like the Lamb, they too are worthy to be rescued out of their slaughter, to receive their destined glory and rule over the nations in God's new Kingdom. In the classic paradigmatic parallel, both parties, the heavenly and earthly counterparts, must pass through the same crucible of suffering as a prelude to their glorification; and Christ, as the "first-born of the dead" (1:5), is a guarantee for the rising of the righteous.

There is an interesting evolution to the idea of paradigm lying behind Revelation's picture. One of the fundamental ideas of Jewish apocalyptic is that triumph is achieved through suffering and apparent defeat. This reflects a rationalization of the Jewish experience: 'We have the only God. He must be intending great things for us. And yet we have suffered and endured subjugation. This can only be because of our own sins and because such subjugation is the necessary avenue to the inevitable exaltation.'

The earliest expression in Jewish thought of a parallel relating to the question of deliverance centered on the legend of the Exodus. As God once delivered us out of slavery from Egypt, the thinking went, he will again do the same. The Exodus was the great past paradigm for the future, and was no doubt largely created—or embellished, following the Babylonian Exile—to serve that role. (Present need always creates past myth.) It was required in order to guarantee the future parallel. In the Exodus, too, a sacrifice played a part. The slaughter of the Paschal lamb protected the Hebrews from God's final persuasive plague on Egypt, the destruction of the first-born. The Passover lamb became a symbol of a kind of redemptive sacrifice.

Once Platonic-type philosophies took hold, however, the idea that history contained the paradigm for future hopes evolved to include the concept that heaven itself contained it, as reflected in the scene in Daniel 7. Scripture was now read accordingly. The Messiah, from an expected human deliverer to be raised up by God at the End-time, became for some interpreters a heavenly being now operating in the spiritual realm, a divine counterpart to the earthly elect-in-waiting. The Lamb became one of the symbols of this heavenly Christ. His sacrifice and triumph in the spirit world (such as is told of in the christological hymn—probably pre-Pauline—of Philippians 2:6-11) guaranteed the redemption of the elect on earth whom he represented. This may well have been the original seminal concept which produced Christianity.

The destiny of those whom the Lamb champions is clear from the prayer to God in 5:9-10 and is portrayed as the ultimate result of the Lamb's sacrifice:

"For thou [the Lamb] wast slain and by thy blood didst purchase for God men of every tribe and language, people and nation; thou hast made of them a royal house, to serve our God as priests; and they shall reign upon the earth."

This final idea is the centerpiece of apocalyptic: the reversal of the age-old order, the revenge of the oppressed and deprived. The apparent "universalism" of these verses is no more than a hyperbolic nod to those non-Jews who have adopted the Jewish God and observance. (Alternatively, though most commentators regard John's milieu as Jewish-Christian, these communities may perhaps have been largely gentile, originally growing out of an attachment to Jewish circles and thoroughly imbued with their ideas and heritage; this would be a way of validating themselves as co- or new inheritors of the Jewish promise.)

There is no exaltation or salvation for the world as a whole. Nor should we expect such a thing. The view of the paradigmatic heavenly figure conforms to the Jews' view of themselves and reflects their feelings and motivations, a response to centuries of domination by others who did not acknowledge the true God. To expect that the Jews would view their own suffering as a necessary prelude to the salvation of their godless subjugators is totally unrealistic—which has not prevented modern scholars from trying to see things this way.

This is why there can be in Revelation none of the later, more syncretistic Christian concept of Atonement (the product of a kind of Jewish and gentile chemical reaction): no vicarious suffering out of love to expiate the sins of mankind. The theory of sacrifice in Revelation is that of the so-called "Maccabean understanding" which is reflected in the late apocryphal document 4 Maccabees: that the blood of Jewish martyrs had a merit which God could apply to the nation as a whole. The blood of the Lamb had merit before God and thereby freed the elect from their sins (1:5), the sins which had led to their suffering. It purified them from the impediment which had stood in the way of their destined elevation by God. The Lamb's sacrifice would also have had an Exodus understanding, in that his blood purchased their freedom from slavery, as had the Passover lamb.

No doubt another passage from scripture had an influence here as well: Isaiah 53, which speaks of the suffering servant who "bore our sufferings on himself," and on whom "the Lord laid . . . the guilt of us all." Scholars have only recently come to accept that for Jews, such passages as Isaiah 53 did not signify any concept of vicarious suffering for the world at large. (See Harry Orlinsky, *The So-Called Servant of the Lord in Second Isaiah*, and Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*.)

Love for the broader world, or mercy, are features not to be found in Revelation, on the part of Christ or anyone else. Scholars who try to read into this document ideas too sophisticated and enlightened for its milieu and its writer, are engaged in wishful interpretation. John Sweet (*Revelation*, p.126) uses the phrase "redemptive love," but nowhere is the Lamb's act styled in any such terms. How Sweet can say things like "the Lamb's death . . . (brought) God to man and man to God" in the face of passages which trumpet "the vengeance of the Lamb" (6:16) and the cry of dead souls to "avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth" (6:10) is a mystery. Sweet may also be guilty of the most self-righteous groaner in the recent history of New Testament commentary: "The spirit of the cry [for vengeance] seems regrettably pre-Christian"!

The hymns in praise of the Lamb in chapter 5 say nothing of love, but concentrate exclusively on power and rule, and the fate of humanity as a whole is one of unmitigated and merciless destruction. This is sectarianism at its most rabid. The prophet has admittedly thrown salvation open to non-Jews who have "passed through the great ordeal" (7:14), but this seems to signify nothing more than gentiles who have converted to the sect's beliefs and stand by their faith until

the end; they share in the benefits of the Lamb's blood and are part of the elect. They, too, shall reign.

II: Silence On The Gospel Jesus

Messianic and Apocalyptic Motifs

The writer regularly refers to "bearing testimony to Jesus." In 19:10 he declares that those who do so are inspired like the prophets. Here once again is that universal motif found in all early Christian expression: giving witness to, in the sense of declaring one's faith in something; a faith, as this verse makes clear, based on inspiration, the work of the Spirit. There is no suggestion in Revelation of apostolic tradition, no information from or about Jesus passed on through a human chain going back to the ministry of Jesus himself. Knowledge of the spiritual Christ comes through spiritual channels.

This prophet is urging upon his readers his own vision about the coming end of the world. He would have had every reason to appeal to the tradition that Jesus himself had made predictions of an apocalyptic nature during his ministry. Indeed, he would have had every reason to quote them. He could surely have made use of some of the prophecies recorded in Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25. (Any general similarity in content is due to both being derived from the common thought-pool of Jewish apocalyptic.)

The one reference to anything resembling Jesus' words in the Gospels, namely, about the thief coming at an unexpected moment (3:3 and 16:15), includes no suggestion that Jesus had spoken something like it during an earthly ministry. In 3:3 the writer puts the idea into the mouth of the visionary Christ dictating the letter to the church at Sardis; the accompanying directive to "remember what you received and heard" refers to the current teaching given by prophets like John. Later, in 16:15, the warning seems to be placed in the mouth of God, or is an author's aside. The saying was probably common in the eschatological repertoire of the day. No hint is given anywhere that Jesus himself during an earthly life had made such pronouncements about the end of the world. (We might note that the two references to the "thief" image to be found in the New Testament epistles, 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10, similarly make no identification of the saying with an earthly teaching Jesus.)

As scholars have pointed out, the language throughout John's vision is entirely that of the Old Testament in its epiphanies (appearances) of divine figures to humans. Christ's first words to the prophet are:

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last, and I am the Living One; for I was dead and now I am alive for evermore." (1:17-18; cf. 22:13)

There is no sense here of a Gospel background, no implication that this Living One had previously revealed himself to a generation of people in an earthly incarnation. The death and renewed life he speaks of have the ring of the mythological, not historical events undergone by a human person. The "First and the Last" is drawn from a Hellenistic title given to the ultimate Deity. The fact that Jesus uses it of himself (and John also places it in God's mouth in 1:8) shows that he is speaking as part of the Godhead, fully identified with the Father. The Christ who dictates the proclamations to the seven churches is a wrathful, thundering, mystic-laden figure, dispensing promises of reward and punishment like an Oriental despot. From the Jesus meek and mild of the Gospels, who sacrifices himself selflessly for the salvation of the world, he is light-years away.

In the first scene in heaven, an elder declares the Lamb worthy to break open the scroll with the seven seals. In what terms does this elder choose to describe the figure of the Lamb? Unfortunately, not by anything that would clearly identify him with the Gospel Jesus. He is "the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David" (5:5). These are messianic titles based on scripture (e.g., Genesis 49:9 and Isaiah 11:1), illustrating yet again that the figure of Christ has been derived from the sacred writings, even if some Christian interpretation could make him quite different from the Messiah of traditional expectation.

We might note that when Paul, at the opening of Romans, makes the first of only two references to the "fleshly" side of Jesus' nature, he too chooses this element derived from scripture, that God's son is "of David's stock." (For a detailed interpretation of such passages, see Supplementary Article No. 8, Christ As "Man", section II.) This traditional designation of the Messiah was so firmly entrenched in Jewish thought that it had to form part of the picture of him, regardless of whether Paul's and John's Christ was now seen as one who moved entirely in the spiritual realm. (The lowest celestial sphere and the demonic powers who controlled it were considered part of the realm of "flesh," and Christ "entered flesh" when he took on the spiritual equivalent of human form and was crucified in that sphere. See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?, as well as Article No. 8.)

As I discuss at length in Article No. 8, our modern minds might well wonder how an entirely spiritual being could be "of David's stock" or "from the tribe of Judah," but we have to realize that we no longer live in the thought-world or the perceived universe of the ancients. For minds like Paul and John the prophet, not to mention most mystics and philosophers of the day, the material world they lived in was only one dimension of reality, the observable half of a larger integrated whole whose other half was hidden from the senses. That other half was referred to as the genuine reality, the "intelligible universe," meaning accessible to the intellect. It contained the higher parallels, the more perfect reflections of lower embodiments on earth. For a deity in that upper spiritual world to be "of David's stock" was wholly conceivable, even if it was one of God's "mysteries" and knowable only through interpretation of and faith in scripture.

The upper world determined and controlled the sensible half of things, the "perceivable universe." While for many the philosopher's mind was the key to unlocking the door to that true reality, for others the avenue lay through various religious experiences and marvelous spiritual practices, such as speaking in tongues and undergoing visionary journeys into the upper realms. God's Spirit was seen as providing revelation, and above all, scripture in its coded writings contained God's message about spiritual realities and heavenly processes. It may be impossible for the modern mind to get inside Paul's or John's head, products of a long-dead thought system, but that a spiritual Christ in a spiritual realm who was in some way linked to David was a part of their larger world, can be seen from the record—when that record is divorced from later Gospel inventions whose presence cannot be detected within it.

A Birth Without a Life

Another resounding silence on the Gospel Jesus was touched on earlier. In 12:1-6, amid the great portents of the End-time drawn by John, we have the vision of the "woman robed with the sun," the woman who, threatened by a great dragon, gives birth to "a male child destined to rule all nations with an iron rod." John makes no attempt to integrate this vision into any traditions about Jesus' earthly nativity, traditions which should surely have been familiar by the end of the first century, when Revelation was probably written. Immediately after the birth—which is portrayed as a heavenly event, not an earthly one—the child is "snatched up to God and his throne" and the mother flees into the wilderness. There is not so much as a nod to Jesus' entire life on earth!

Later (12:13) another reference is made to this male child, and if one looks at this passage and compares it with the reference to the sacrificed Lamb a few verses earlier (12:11), one sees that no connection is made at this point between the Lamb and the male child. Besides, the birth of the child seems to be a *future* event, part of the writer's vision, while the Lamb's slaughter is already accomplished.

Commentators have scrambled to explain all this discrepancy with the Gospel story and often end up acknowledging that the scene has nothing to do with Mary and Jesus, but reflects Jewish messianism mediated through Hellenistic mythical motifs. It relates to Jewish apocalyptic mythology about the miraculous birth of the Messiah, who simply bides his time in heaven until the End. The vision speaks of the child's escape from Satan, but it also embodies fantastic details from the myth of Isis and Horus (or Leto and Apollo), about the goddess who flees with her newborn son from a dragon (Typhon). Other interpreters relate the woman to Eve or to an ideal, glorified Israel.

But such commentators fail to carry these admissions to their logical conclusion. How can Revelation be a Christian document (in the orthodox sense) if the child destined to rule all nations is not linked with the sacrificed Lamb? How can a Christian writer present a picture of mother and Messiah which is so at odds with the story of Jesus' birth and life as it should have been known to believers of his time? The conclusion has to be that the author of Revelation, whether we style him Christian or Jewish, has no knowledge of Mary or anything to do with the birth of Jesus. If he possessed such traditions as are familiar to us from the Gospels, they would inevitably have imposed themselves upon his crafting of this scene involving the Messiah and his mother. Whatever the sectarian position which this document represents, it jumbles its mythical motifs of child, Messiah, sacrificed Lamb and the Danielic "one like a son of man" with no suggestion that any concept or picture of Jesus of Nazareth lies in the background to unify them.

G. Beasley-Murray, in his commentary on Revelation (*Revelation*, p.199f), simply turns a blind eye to the whole problem. He notes that some interpreters deem it impossible that a Christian could have exalted Jesus to heaven as soon as he was born, and so they take the "birth" of the child as symbolizing Jesus' death and resurrection. This is bad enough, but Beasley-Murray prefers a different explanation: that since the author "knew" that his readers would understand all which implicitly lay behind his deficient mythological drama, he was content to let it "stand for" the entire Christ event. (Sweet, *op.cit.*, p.197, appeals to a similar 'explanation'.) When anything can be made to stand for whatever one wants to see in it, silence and contradiction obviously evaporate as a difficulty!

Beasley-Murray (p.200, n.1) also points to the christological hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16, which "passes straight from the birth of Christ to his resurrection," as similarly containing "no mention of the life and death of Christ." Apparently, this silence "stands for" the same thing as it does in Revelation, providing a comforting confirmation of the elements he and others insist on reading into documents which have curiously left them out. One silence is used to support another silence, together constituting 'proof' of the thing they are silent on: a good example of a common sort of New Testament math.

The "One Like a Son of Man"

Revelation's use of the phrase "one like a son of man" shows that this writer could have known of no tradition that Jesus on earth had referred to himself this way, for he uses it in its pristine form, drawn directly from Daniel 7; he does not turn it into a title such as the Gospels do for Jesus: "*the* Son of Man." In 14:14, this figure is portrayed simply as an angel, in a scene with

"other angels." This angel is ordered by a second angel (Sweet fusses over the question of whether it would be proper for an angel to give orders to Christ) to harvest the earth—meaning its humanity—with a sharp scythe. Unlike the earlier use of the term in 1:13, it is difficult here to make a link between the "one like a son of man" and Christ, so that John J. Collins (*The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p.83) denies such a link altogether, identifying him simply as an angel, which is one of the interpretations sometimes made of the figure in Daniel 7. This lack of consistency, an unconcern for logical coherence and relationships in the presentation of a variety of material which has been put together in chaotic fashion, is one of the hallmarks of apocalyptic writing as a genre.

Thus, when we reach 19:11 and find yet another figure who is described as "he who shall rule (the nations) with an iron rod," this time a Rider referred to as "the Word of God" and seemingly to be identified with the Lamb (since both are "King of kings and Lord of lords"), we are unsure what relationship he bears to the child of chapter 12, who is also said to hold the same destiny of iron rule. There are those who claim, given Revelation's apocalyptic nature just described, one lacking logic and consistency, that both the child and the angelic "son of man" must be thrown into the common pot, that all these varied visionary descriptions are different views of the Christ. It is just that they have been uncoordinated, their contradictions allowed to stand, their hodge-podge inclusion simply for dramatic effect on the part of a writer whose palette contains colors from the entire spectrum of ancient mythology and visionary imagery.

Maybe so. But that this extravagant canvas can be aligned with the Gospel Jesus is extremely dubious. Had all of these various motifs and images been derived from an historical figure, that figure would have imposed a semblance of unity and coordination on John's multi-faceted picture. As it is, the writer has plucked an assortment of ideas from the mythology of the day and pressed them into service for his end-of-the-world scenario, and because these ideas related to a variety of speculations about the spiritual realm and the spiritual figure some believed lay at the focus of End-time expectations, the lack of unity and alignment among these ideas was natural and created no problem. It is only for us, who have since had an historical Jesus added to the mix as the supposed object of all these manifestations, that a problematic confusion exists.

Crucifixion in a Great City

It is often claimed that Revelation does contain one reference to a circumstance of Jesus' historical life. In 11:1-13 the author incorporates what are probably two earlier Jewish oracles originally spoken during the tribulations of the Jewish War. The first relates to the Temple and the abandonment of its outer court to the invading gentile. In the second, two prophets shall prophecy in the Holy City and then be slain. . . .

"Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." (11:8, RSV translation)

Is John using these oracles literally, or only as a symbolic representation (in a piece of writing saturated with symbolism) of the people of God being rejected and attacked by the godless world? As for verse 8's "great city," many commentators regard this as symbolic, and not a literal reference to Jerusalem. For example, John Sweet (*op. cit.*, p.187) suggests that it represents the social and political embodiment of rebellion against God; "its present location is Rome." P. E. Hughes (*Revelation: A Commentary*, p.127) takes it as denoting "the worldwide structure of unbelief and defiance against God." G. A. Kroedel (*Augsberg Commentary on Revelation*, p. 226), while regarding the city on one level as Jerusalem, sees it "not as a geographical location but a symbolic place," representing the immoral, idolatrous, oppressive world. It is, then, a symbol of the corruption personified by great cities in general, the godless world "where their

Lord was crucified." This says no more than that the sacrifice of Christ was the responsibility of the forces of evil and those who reject the gospel, a mystical concept which may have had no more historical substance than this in the mind of the writer.

We might also note that the clause "where their Lord was crucified" could be taken as tied primarily to the "allegorically called Sodom and Egypt" (the Greek phrase is literally "spiritually called"), and would thus be a step removed from any literal material "city," even were the latter to be understood as Jerusalem.

O. S. Wintermute, in a study of the Apocalypse of Elijah (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, p.748, note 'w'), observes that the term "great city" is frequently a pejorative expression, and was most often applied to the metropolis of a detested enemy. Comparing Revelation, he admits that its author always uses the term to refer to Rome. However, he insists that the one exception is here in 11:8, "where it is used to describe the city in which the Lord was crucified." This is a good example of the practice of denying the acknowledged evidence on the basis of preconception. Wintermute would no doubt follow his argument full circle and declare that because the reference is to Jerusalem, this proves the writer is referring to the historical Jesus.

As for the reference to the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" whose names are inscribed on the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (21:14), this is a mystic number and not identified with any historical figures. This is indicated by the context: the heavenly Jerusalem possesses twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a city wall with twelve foundation stones; upon these stones are inscribed "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Such "apostles" could have been envisioned as being of the type of John himself, namely prophets of the spiritual Christ.). It was probably such symbolic thinking which created the tradition that Jesus had had twelve disciples during an earthly ministry.

Finally, the reference to "the Lord's Day" (1:10) can as easily be to the Jewish Sabbath as to the later Christian Sunday, and commentators are in fact split as to its meaning.

Epilogue

Despite the apologetic efforts of those seeking to rehabilitate this document for the modern mind, it is difficult to see Revelation as anything more than a paroxysm of hate created by a mind bordering on the psychotic. The early church long resisted placing it in the developing canon of inspired writings. John the prophet has cast his spiritual Christ in his own joyless and vengeful image. The voice of this Messiah is his own, ready to punish for every slight, every rejection the prophet has suffered in his missionary work. The group of seven cities to whom proclamations are issued at the beginning of the book are all located within a few days' journey of each other in western Asia Minor and undoubtedly represent the circle of John's preaching activity.

That all Christian prophets of John's day were quite so fulminating and vindictive is perhaps doubtful, but the work should give us a good picture of Christ belief in certain circles (Jewish-Christian?) of that period and geographical location. While some favor the year 68 or 69 as the date of Revelation's composition, before the Jewish War reached its destructive climax, most scholars date the book in the mid-90s. This is probably the better date, if only because the earlier one presumes that John, from his exile on Patmos, was conversant with ongoing events in Palestine and was influenced by them, whereas no Palestinian focus is evident in the book. Other reasons for dating the writing some time after the Jewish War include the use of "Babylon" for Rome, an allegorical epithet which likely took a little time after 70 CE to be applied to the modern-day destroyer of Jerusalem and the Temple; plus the presence of allusions to the legend

that Nero was not dead and would return with a conquering army from the east, an idea which, again, is unlikely to have arisen so soon after the emperor's suicide in 68.

Those beliefs of John and his preaching circles envision a spiritual Christ in heaven who is "the Living One," God's intermediary channel. He is also the Deity's agent, whose task is to engineer the events of the End-time. He has undergone sacrifice in the higher spiritual world, an event revealed in the sacred writings (though Revelation tells us far less about this than other early Christian writings). Through that sacrifice, Christ serves as the paradigmatic guarantor of the faithful believer's elevation to power in the new Jerusalem when the End arrives. All these beliefs fit perfectly into the varied and widespread religious views of the time, evidenced in Christian circles by the New Testament epistles themselves, about a mediator-Son who is an aspect of God and his instrument of salvation (the name "Jesus" has the meaning of "Savior"), one who operates in the spirit realm and is revealed through inspiration and scripture.

The arrival of this Christ John declares to be imminent. "I am coming quickly," says Jesus in the closing lines, displaying words and sentiments which give no impression that this will be anything other than his first coming to earth, the same as that conveyed by all the other expressions of an anticipated Parousia throughout early Christian literature. "Come, Lord Jesus," John calls with his final breath, echoing the Aramaic plea of Paul at the close of 1 Corinthians: "Marana tha — Come, O Lord!" For a world that has known the new Lord Christ only through visions and God's revelation of him in scripture longs finally to see him in person with its own eyes.

Crossing The Threshold Of History
Jesus in the Apostolic Fathers at the Turn of the Second Century

Part One: 1 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas

Introduction

In other Supplementary Articles, I have examined the documents of the New Testament outside the Gospels and Acts, attempting to demonstrate that they make no identifiable link between the Christ Jesus they worship and preach, and the human figure Jesus of Nazareth known to us through the Gospels. Paul and other epistle writers seem to speak of a divine being very similar to aspects of Jewish personified Wisdom and the Son and Logos in Greek philosophy (as in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Hebrews 1:2-3), without linking such a being to the Gospel figure or events. These earliest Christians believe *in* a Son of God, not that anyone in the recent past *was* the Son of God. This Son is a spiritual entity with whom believers enter upon a mystical relationship. He is an intermediary between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, between the spiritual and the material realms of the universe. And he is for most early Christian sects a savior deity who has undergone a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and humanity's redemption. All these features are common elements of contemporary religious philosophy and salvation religions.

Only three passages in the epistles give the appearance of linking to an earthly, Gospel-like setting. First, 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 speaks of "the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus," but this is part of a passage which makes a clear allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem, an event which happened after Paul's death, and many critical scholars have long regarded it as an interpolation. (See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?)

Second, 1 Timothy 6:13 makes a passing reference to Pilate, but critical scholars in general regard the Pastorals as the product of the 2nd century, and thus this reference could reflect an early development of belief in an historical Gospel Jesus. Also, some scholars see problems in the fit of this reference within its context, and although none of them opt for interpolation, there are good arguments to be made for assuming this possibility. (See the Appendix to Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?)

Third, the so-called Lord's Supper scene in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 bears a resemblance to the Last Supper of the Synoptic Gospels. Yet Paul declares (verse 23) that he has received this information directly "from the Lord" which conflicts with the standard reading that this is an item of historical tradition about a Eucharist established by Jesus, a tradition missing in all other first-century documents outside the Synoptics. This type of sacred meal is very similar to the sacred meals of the mystery cults, and thus Paul's Supper may be relegated to the realm of myth, something he has come up with himself under the influence of perceived revelation. (See the "Sacred Meal" section of Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel.)

To address two other, minor, references. The phrase "brother of the Lord" which Paul uses of James in Galatians 1:19 cannot be demonstrated to mean "sibling of Jesus" and other considerations argue against it. Finally, Paul's two little directives in 1 Corinthians (7:10 and 9:14) which he says he has received "from the Lord" again suggest personal revelation. Their subject matter is paltry compared to the vast silence on Jesus' ethical teachings found throughout the epistles. (On these and other references see The Sound of Silence: Appendix.)

Thus, in the absence of a ministry of preaching, miracles, apocalyptic prophecy or the events of the Passion story, nothing in the New Testament epistles can be reliably linked to the Gospel picture. When this pervasive silence is set alongside the positive statements the epistle writers *do* make, that Christ is a newly revealed “secret/mystery” of God hitherto hidden for a long period of time, and that knowledge about him comes from scripture and revelation (e.g., Romans 16:25-26, Colossians 1:26 and 2:2, Ephesians 3:5), that the critical events and God’s actions in the present age are solely this process of revelation through the Spirit (e.g., 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5), when it is God who is spoken of as providing the gospel and appointing apostles (e.g., Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 12:28), when it is God who is said to have instituted the love command and other ethical teachings (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 2 John 6 and several times in 1 John), when Paul says that it is he, not Jesus, who has been given the task of establishing the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:5), when all the epistle writers speak of Christ being “revealed” and “manifested” in these final days (e.g., 1 Peter 1:20, Hebrews 9:26), or of their expectation of Christ’s future appearance on earth, giving no suggestion that he had already appeared here in the recent past (e.g., Hebrews 10:37, 1 Peter 1:7)—then we have a clear picture of a faith movement that was not started by any figure in living memory, but one based on revelation and a new interpretation of scripture, all of it governed by the dominant philosophical and religious ideas of the age.

Finally, in regard to those handful of human-sounding references to Christ’s “body,” his sacrifice of “blood” or his activities in the realm of “flesh,” even his characterization as “man” (as in 1 Corinthians 15 or Romans 5:15), two observations must be made. First, not one of them makes a link with a recent historical person or includes a context of historical time and place. Two, these features can be interpreted in a Platonic manner, in that elements in the material world had their corresponding higher counterparts (such as Philo’s Heavenly Man) in the supernatural dimension, the ascending layers of ever purer spiritual forms and activities in the heavenly realm. Indeed, the salvation thinking of the day was centered on a system whereby those two portions of the universe, the spiritual and the material, interacted with one another. A savior deity could operate entirely in that upper dimension, descending through its layers to take on an ever-increasing “likeness” to material forms and thereby undergo death and resurrection, acts which guaranteed salvation and other benefits for their devotees in the material world. (See Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?) The activities of the Hellenistic savior gods, such as Attis, Adonis and Mithras, are every bit as human and earthly sounding as those of Paul’s Christ (even more so, since they have more developed stories), yet they were in this period placed in the realm of myth in a Platonic upper-world setting, having evolved out of a more primitive primordial-time conception. There is nothing to prevent us from viewing Paul’s Christ in just such a setting. (For a full discussion of this Platonic picture in early Christianity, see Article No. 8: Christ As “Man”: Does Paul Speak of Jesus as an Historical Person? and Article No. 9: A Sacrifice in Heaven: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews.)

Other features of the Pauline spiritual Christ were no doubt concluded from scripture, such as the fact that he was “of David’s stock” in Romans 1:3 (Paul points to the prophets as his source), or that he was “born of woman” in Galatians 4:4 (probably from Isaiah 7:14). This was in keeping with the general view, as evidenced in documents like Hebrews and 1 Clement, that Christ and his activities were to be found in the sacred writings and that many passages therein were to be regarded as his “voice.” Scripture was God’s window onto the unseen, true reality, and the agencies and workings of salvation.

Even some documents extending into the second century (some of them *well* into it) can be shown not to contain the concept of an historical Jesus, such as 2 Peter (often dated a decade or two beyond the year 100 CE), and the Pastoral epistles. (For the former, see Article No. 7: Transfigured on the Holy Mountain: The Beginnings of Christianity. On the Pastorals, see The

Sound of Silence: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. (See the Sound of Silence files for detailed discussion of the silences in all the New Testament documents.) Many of the major apologists writing throughout the second century do not present an historical Jesus as part of their picture of the faith, and one, Minucius Felix, goes so far as to scoff at the claim that Christians worship a crucified man and his cross. (See Main Article No. 6: The Second Century Apologists.) Finally, to round out the picture, the lack of an historical Jesus in the final book of the New Testament, Revelation, is presented in Supplementary Article No. 11: The Gospel According to the Prophet John.

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Hopefully, the reader has indulged me this brief overview in preparation for the present article. If so much of the evidence points to the lack of an historical Jesus in the thinking of the earliest Christians and an only gradual and piecemeal adoption of the historicity of the Gospel picture through the course of the second century, can we follow the evolution of this adoption through some of the surviving non-canonical documents that covered the critical crossover period beginning around the turn of the second century? Four of these I regard as lying on the antecedent side of that ‘threshold of history.’ Two have been dealt with at some length in other articles and will not be repeated here: The Odes of Solomon in Article No. 4: The Odes of Solomon, and the Didache, whose lack of an historical Jesus I have argued in my book review of John Dominic Crossan’s *The Birth of Christianity*.

That leaves the epistle 1 Clement and The Shepherd of Hermas. On the threshold itself lies the Epistle of Barnabas. And just beyond it, a few steps into the new Christian world of a Jesus born of Mary and crucified by Pilate, we find the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. (This does not mean that these documents were necessarily written in that order.)

Close dating of these documents is not critical to the argument, nor is the ‘authenticity’ of their authorship. Nevertheless, these questions will be addressed, particularly in regard to the dating of 1 Clement. Many radical scholars over more than a century have called into question the basic authenticity of 1 Clement and the letters of Ignatius, often relegating them to much later periods, as late as around 160. We know, of course, that the so-called “Longer Recension” of the Ignatian letters is a later forgery, in which a host of Gospel features have been inserted (a prime example of the blatant Christian forgery and doctoring of writings which infests the overall documentary period). But what of the “Shorter Recension” which has a less detailed and more primitive character? I’ll address these points without making a firm decision on precisely where to locate such documents. The main purpose will be to survey the evolution of certain strands in the picture of the early Christian Son throughout a period of, say, up to thirty years, probably spanning the last years of the first century and the first part of the second.

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The Epistle 1 Clement

Considerations of Dating

Traditional mainstream scholarship has for more than a hundred years tended to date 1 Clement to the 90s of the first century, sometimes even pinpointing it to the year following Domitian’s death in 96. This is chiefly on the basis of the somewhat enigmatic reference in the first sentence to “the sudden and repeated calamities which have befallen us,” something that has delayed the writer’s attention to his letter. The assumption has been that this refers to the reputed persecution of Christians under Domitian in the latter years of his reign. But the evidence for such a persecution is scant and uncertain, as some commentators admit. Kirsopp Lake, for

example, in the Loeb *Apostolic Fathers* (vol.1, p.5), allows that “we know very little about the alleged persecution in the time of Domitian, and it would not be prudent to decide that the epistle cannot be another ten or fifteen years later.” R. M. Grant (*The Apostolic Fathers*, vol.2, p.16, n.1) notes that “little is known about such persecutions,” while William R. Schoedel in his chapter “The Apostolic Fathers” (in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, p.461), refers to “an important study” by Gerbert Brunner who denies that 1 Clement 1:1 must refer to a persecution. If that is the case, “a wide range of possible dates for 1 Clement is thus opened up.”

Schoedel suggests, however, that a date as early as around 69 (put forward by a few commentators, including recently Alvar Ellegard in his *Jesus—One Hundred Years Before Christ*) is based on “strained” evidence. (I discuss this question in my website review of Ellegard’s book.) If 1:1 does refer to a persecution, the letter of Pliny to Trajan around 112 shows that persecution, even if local and spottily carried out, must have been fairly frequent during the period, as Pliny asks for advice of an emperor who was expected to have some familiarity with a general policy on the matter.

Other indications within the epistle seem to push the date to a point no earlier than the late years of the century. At least a generation has passed since the time of the apostles (44:2-3); those who carry the letter to Corinth “have been with us from youth to old age” (63:3); and the Corinthian church is “ancient” (47:6). References to Peter and Paul in chapter 5 apparently place them at some distance from the writer’s time. Thus it is probably a safe compromise to date 1 Clement sometime in the period 90 to 110. For the purposes of this article, a more specific date is not necessary. (The position that the epistle is a much later “forgery” and not what it purports to be, namely a letter from a Roman congregation to one in Corinth in response to difficulties being experienced by the latter community, but is instead a mid-second century product designed to further a later agenda, will be looked at in the final part of this section.)

On the matter of authorship, its assignation by late second century commentators like Irenaeus to the purported third “bishop of Rome” (in line from the apostle Peter), one Clement of Rome, is today not generally accepted as having much reliability, but as this question is irrelevant to the present article, I will not spend space discussing it here. In any case, the picture of the authority structure in the epistle’s community seems primitive, lacking a strong, monarchical head. “Bishops” and “presbyters” are almost on the same footing. This, together with the implication (as in chapter 44) of a not-too-distant link to the age of the original “apostles” who began the principle of apostolic succession—if this is not simply a device within the ‘later forgery’ scenario—would recommend limiting the date of the epistle to a point not too far into the second century.

Note: I will primarily use the translation of Maxwell Staniforth in the Penguin Classics edition (though I have dropped his capital H’s), because he captures a more natural sense for modern readers than does Kirsopp Lake’s greater formality in the Loeb edition. But I will occasionally dip into the latter for a more literal rendition and to make specific points, identifying it as such.

The Nature of Christ in 1 Clement

Whoever the author was, he is steeped in Jewish traditions and a knowledge of scripture, though this is of the Greek Septuagint. This no doubt reflects the character of the Christian community in Rome of which he was a part, although it does not require that the community was composed primarily of Jews. As R. M. Grant points out (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p.37), much of the tone of the epistle is Greek, even Stoic, and at the very least it would have to be styled as

belonging to Hellenistic Judaism. But is the author steeped as well in a knowledge of the historical Jesus? Assuming, quite naturally, that the community in Corinth could not have been too different in this respect from the writer's own, what picture of Jesus do we find in the key centers of Rome and Corinth around the turn of the second century?

This overlong, rambling letter is generally regarded as the earliest surviving Christian document which is not part of the New Testament, although core parts (if not all) of the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* may be roughly as old or older. If we accept the letter at face value, the Corinthian church was experiencing a dispute over leadership, a younger group rebelling against the authority of the appointed elders, so someone from the church at Rome wrote a letter attempting to mediate and restore tranquility. That the circles which 1 Clement represents are approaching the moment when an historical Jesus was to crystallize in their thought seems evident, even though they have not quite reached that point. If a 90s dating for the epistle is accurate, Ignatius' arrival in Rome to be martyred in the arena lay only a decade or two in the future. Whether the Roman community itself was in the process of adopting an historical Jesus by that time we cannot be sure from the Ignatian epistle to the Romans. (Perhaps Ignatius himself was to bring them that conviction!)

The claim that the writer of 1 Clement possessed the concept of a recent historical Jesus may have some grounds in the letter, but this impression is compromised by other passages which suggest a different interpretation. Like much early Christian expression, the main focus by Clement (I will refer to the author by that name) is on God the Father, his goodness and mercy, his wishes and commandments (e.g., 29:1, 38:4). In 35:5, the writer fixes his mind "trustfully on God"; he finds out "what is pleasing and acceptable to him"; he does "whatever agrees with his perfect will." Clement's emotions, his love and respect, are almost entirely given to God, not to the figure of Christ. The name "Jesus" is never used by itself, but only in conjunction with "Christ" or "Lord" and usually as part of the phrase "Our Lord Jesus Christ" or a variant. When a single name is used, it is always "Christ." When Clement focuses on this Christ, he says things like (7:4), "Let us fix our gaze on the Blood of Christ, and let us know that it is precious to his Father, because it was poured out for our salvation and brought the grace of repentance to all the world." The closest he comes to expressing a feeling toward him is 21:6: "Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us." The largely abstract, even formal, way that the writer deals with the figure of Jesus, taken together with the vast silence on almost every aspect of an earthly career, does not speak to the memory of a vital historical figure in their recent past to whom believers feel a close personal and human bond.

This is not to say that Christ is not a prominent entity in the epistle. But the relationship between the Father and Son sounds like an echo of Paul, with his concept of "in Christ" and "through Christ," phrases which Clement also uses frequently. "[We] have fled for refuge to his [God's] mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (22.11). Employing other echoes of Paul and Hebrews, Clement says (36): "...even Jesus Christ, the High Priest by whom our gifts are offered, and the Protector by whom our feebleness is aided...through him we can look up to the highest heaven and see, as in a glass, the peerless perfection of the face of God...through him the Lord permits us to taste the wisdom of eternity." Such passages suggest that Clement sees Christ as a spiritual entity, an intermediary between God and humanity, one who serves as the revealer of God and his agent of redemption.

Like Paul, too, Christ is joined to Clement's community in a mystical way, closely in parallel with God himself. "Have we not all the same God, and the same Christ? Is not the same Spirit of grace shed upon us all? Have we not all the same calling in Christ? Then why are we rending and tearing asunder the limbs of Christ, and fomenting discord against our own body?" (46:6-7) That all inhabit the same celestial and spiritual sphere, and share the same nature, seems evident from

58:2: “As surely as God lives, as Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Ghost (on whom are [presumably plural, the Greek is unspecific] set the faith and hope of God’s elect)...” As with Paul, there is never any question about having faith that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the Christ, or that he rose from the dead in flesh in the Gospel context, or that such an historical act was indeed an act of redemption. The process of God revealing himself through Jesus, saving humanity through Jesus’ blood, or even the “teaching” of Our Lord Jesus Christ himself (which we shall examine presently), is never related to an earthly, historical setting or human character. Christ is a present power, not a past personality.

Speaking Through Scripture

How does this Christ communicate with Christians? Clement seems to give us two different kinds of answer. One is reminiscent of Hebrews, where the Son was conceived as speaking through scripture. (See Article No. 9: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews.) Clement presents the identical view. It is most clear in chapter 22:

“All these promises [by God] find their confirmation when we believe in Christ, for it is he himself [i.e., Christ] who summons us through the Holy Spirit, with the words: ‘Come, children, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord...’ ”

Scripture, as always, is regarded as “the authentic voice of the Holy Spirit” (45:2), and here the Spirit speaks a passage from Psalm 34 (11-17). Clement regards these words as a personal summons from Christ himself. Christ, in the medium of the Spirit, speaks through the sacred writings, and because of the way Psalm 39 is phrased, Clement presents the lines as though Christ is telling Christian readers that he will teach them the fear of the Lord (i.e., God). Christ is a spiritual entity who communicates with the world through scripture, and one of his roles is to reveal God. This is in the same vein as the somewhat more abstract Logos in thought like that of Philo of Alexandria, a force which serves as the medium to present to the mind of humanity an otherwise unknowable Deity who dwells in the highest, purely spiritual realm of heaven. It is similar to the Son and Word in the Odes of Solomon, a Revealer entity with no sacrificial dimension, also not linked to an historical figure on earth. And it is close to the “Son of God” in the Shepherd, as we shall see.

Following the passage in chapter 36 quoted above, in which Jesus Christ provides (in the present time, an intermediary function) the “glass” through which one can “look up to the highest heaven and see the peerless perfection of the face of God,” Clement goes on to say:

“For it is written, ‘He makes his angels into winds...’ but of the Son the Lord declares, ‘You are my Son, this very day have I fathered you...’ Again, God says to him, ‘Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies a cushion for your feet.’ ”

Like the writer of Hebrews, Clement sees God speaking of and to the Son in the writings. Scripture is a window onto the heavenly realm where Father and Son are seen to converse. Like Hebrews, Clement shows no knowledge of any tradition that some of these words had been spoken out of heaven to the human Jesus at the time of his baptism at the Jordan.

If Clement regards Christ as a revealer of God, of his wishes and intentions toward the world, why is the vast tradition on these subjects attached to the teaching Jesus in the Gospels never put forward in the epistle? In the two or three passages in which Clement suggests a teaching Jesus, are these essentially different from those implying spiritual communication? Defenders of Jesus’ historicity, of course, claim that they are. Chapter 13 contains the most significant. (I have slightly altered Staniforth’s translation of the first sentence to make it closer to the literal Greek.)

“Let us remember the words of the Lord Jesus which he spoke (*elalêsen*) when teaching gentleness and longsuffering. For he said this: ‘Be merciful, that you may obtain mercy. Forgive, that you may be forgiven. What you do yourself, will be done to you; what you give will be given to you; as you judge, so will you be judged; as you show kindness, so it will be shown to you. Your portion will be weighed out for you in your own scales.’ ”

There is no denying the close similarity of these sentiments to parts of the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, but neither the words nor their sequence are anywhere near identical to a Gospel passage. Clement’s phrasing, in fact, is pretty basic and smacks of the field of popular maxims. We know that this type of moral directive belonged among the ethical commonplaces of the day. (Both the Didache and Epistle of Barnabas, not to mention Paul and the epistle of James, quote maxims similar to Jesus’ Gospel teachings which are never attributed to him.) It is quite possible that such maxims were now regarded by communities like Clement’s as having been revealed by a heavenly Christ through prophets. Wherever such directives may have come from, scholars such as R. M. Grant (*The Apostolic Fathers*, vol.1: *An Introduction*, p.40) acknowledge that Clement’s source is probably oral, rather than any written version of a Gospel. (Grant appeals to Helmut Koester, who is generally regarded as the leading authority on the subject of the Fathers’ dependence on oral tradition rather than on written Gospels: see his *Ancient Christian Gospels*, p.14-20.)

That Clement knew any of the Gospels has never been satisfactorily demonstrated. This in itself is an indicator that the Gospel of Mark was not likely written as early as 65-70, or intended as an historical account. For how could one explain why the prominent Christian community in the capital of the Empire would not have received a copy of it, or that one of its leaders would not be familiar with key parts of its text, even after the passage of some three decades? If Matthew and Luke were both written before 90, this should indicate that interest and knowledge of the Gospels was spreading throughout Christian communities. And yet Rome, apparently, has yet to hear of them.

Too much in this epistle indicates that Clement has no knowledge of important Gospel traditions, even in oral form. A few verses later, in 14:4, he says: “It is written, ‘the kind-hearted will inhabit the earth, and the innocent will remain upon it, but the transgressors will be rooted out of it.’ ” Who does not hear in that first phrase the ringing opening verses from the Sermon itself, one of those Beatitudes which surely impressed themselves on all who knew anything of Jesus’ teachings? Yet Clement introduces these words with “It is written,” referring to scripture; and in fact he is quoting two verses from Proverbs (2:21-22) to which he goes on to add several more quotations from the Old Testament.

We read other passages in the epistle: on giving versus receiving (2:1), on repentance (8:1), on the promise of resurrection (26:2); yet Clement shows no sign of being aware that Jesus had said anything on these topics. On repentance, Clement goes so far as to offer a number of lengthy quotes from God himself found in scripture, but not a word from Jesus’ own catalogue, as in Mark 1:15 or Luke 13:3-5. Similarly, Clement appeals to scripture and the ‘sayings’ of God as guarantee of the resurrection, while remaining silent on such Gospel teachings as Luke 14:14 or Matthew 22:31. He can make direct quotation of the “promises” of resurrection in 26:2, but they are only God’s words, not those of Jesus. Clement can offer his own parable of a sower (24:5) without reminding his readers that Jesus had spoken one, too. In his great panegyric on Christian love in chapters 48 to 50, he has neither room nor interest, it seems, to quote Jesus’ own inspiring sayings on the subject.

When Clement urges his readers to believe that God’s purpose to establish his Kingdom will be accomplished swiftly, he appeals solely to Old Testament prophecies about the Day of the Lord, ignoring all of Jesus’ Gospel pronouncements about the coming End and his own Parousia

(arrival at the End time). Indeed, the latter seems unknown to this writer, despite all the Gospel predictions (as well as Q's) about the Son of Man and his imminent coming, for in several passages (23:5, 34:3, 35:4) Clement speaks only in terms of the more traditional Jewish expectation of the coming of God himself. Could this writer have any knowledge of the Gospels and its prominent feature of Jesus' predicted return? Could the entire tradition on the Son of Man in Q and the Gospels have any authenticity in regard to Clement's Jesus, and Clement be ignorant of it? How could he be ignorant of oral traditions about Jesus' imminent coming or return, if this was a widespread and prominent feature of Christian expectation, as it surely should have been? In 23:5, Clement addresses himself to "scripture's own testimony" that the Day of the Lord is imminent: "He will surely come quickly; he will not delay," and "With no warning the Lord, the Holy One you are expecting, will come to his temple." Clearly the expected arrival is that of God, not of Jesus.

In chapter 53, after a long dissertation on forgiveness, Clement searches for words to sum up his case. They are not words of Jesus on the cross, but the plea of Moses to God that he forgive the disobedient Israelites. Clement extols Moses' benevolence: "What immeasurable love...a minister speaking up boldly to his Lord and demanding pardon for the multitude!" Would he have chosen words from the Old Testament had he known of Luke's saying?

Now, it has been suggested that some of these objections on Clement's silence amount to "straw men." Jesus' words on the cross, "Father forgive them..." are found only in Luke, whose invention they may certainly be. The Beatitude popularly known as "Blessed are the meek," to which I have compared Clement's appeal to Proverbs, appears only in the Sermon on the Mount, and may be an enlargement by Matthew over the version appearing in Luke's Sermon on the Plain. We should not, they say, expect elements in the Gospels now regarded as unhistorical to be known to early Christian commentators.

Even if Matthew's specific beatitude is confined to him, the general sentiment that the lowly and disenfranchised will prove to be the inheritors when the Kingdom arrives, that the humble shall be exalted and the mighty humbled, is a central feature of Jesus' preaching in the Gospels. Any sentiment in such a direction should have attracted an attribution to him. In general, however, there is a further consideration that is consistently overlooked.

If a sectarian movement were begun, or even regarded as begun, by a famous teacher, it is clear that teachings on important matters that later arose would be put in his mouth; that practices later adopted by the sect would be regarded as established by him; that warnings, predictions of the future, promises to send a Spirit which authenticates later views, and so on, would be imputed to him. This can be said to be "clear" because the entire Christian record from Q and the Gospels onward witnesses to this universal phenomenon of sectarian behavior. All sorts of sayings and deeds were attributed to Jesus which critical scholarship now regards as inauthentic.

Clement *should* have possessed some word of Jesus to support key issues like repentance and forgiveness, the promise of resurrection, the coming of the Kingdom and his own return, whether in fact a real historical Jesus had said anything about them or not. Any movement following teachings of an historical figure, and certainly of the historical Jesus supposedly behind Q and the Gospels, should have possessed a much richer body of tradition associated with such a figure than Clement displays. Indeed, his catalogue is threadbare.

Other Silences in the Epistle

Nor does Clement possess traditions about Jesus raising the dead, which would have been a powerful argument in urging his readers to believe in the feasibility of resurrection. Q apparently had such traditions (note Luke/Q 7:22), decades earlier and they are prolific in the Gospels. How much more powerful would Lazarus have been than the rather strained example of the phoenix (25) as proof of God's intent to resurrect humans? Clement should also have had traditions about Jesus' healings. And yet in chapter 59, he makes this appeal to *God*:

"Save those of us who are in affliction, have mercy on the lowly, raise the fallen, show thyself to those in need, heal the sick, turn again the wanderers of thy people, feed the hungry, ransom our prisoners, raise up the weak, comfort the faint-hearted."

If Clement is in the same line as Q and the Gospels, if he was exposed to those oral traditions we would regard as mainstream in the early Christian movement, how could he not know that Jesus had reputedly done many of these very things, and at least make some passing mention of them? Such mention would be absolutely natural, even if his readers were familiar with them. Why, indeed, not appeal to Jesus himself to effect these things in the community now?

Q and the Gospels are also centered on John the Baptist. Was the latter figure not a part of mainstream Christian tradition? We would have to think not, to judge by the total body of the New Testament epistles which never mentions him, nor the baptism of Jesus himself by John. Clement makes that silence more resounding when he focuses on those who "went about in sheepskins and goatskins heralding the Messiah's coming" (17:1) but leaves out John the Baptist, mentioning only Old Testament figures like Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel. His "other famous names" are limited to Abraham, Moses and David.

Another missing figure is Judas, when we might expect that treacherous apostle to be offered as an example of how envy and jealousy had adverse effects on famous figures, this one Jesus himself. In chapters 4 and 5, Clement itemizes many Old Testament luminaries who suffered at the hands of betrayers, and follows that up with the more contemporary examples of Peter and Paul who were "assailed by envy and jealousy." On Judas he is silent, as also in 45:7 when telling of "iniquitous men...who delivered over to torments" the pious and the innocent. And if martyrdom is in view in chapter 5, why is there no mention of Acts' Stephen who was stoned for his championing of Jesus by the envious Jews?

But there is a void even more dramatic in Clement's apparent knowledge of Jesus' life. Even without a written Gospel, his community should have possessed traditions about the historical event of the crucifixion, about Jesus' trial and sufferings. In chapter 16 he presents Christ as a pattern for humility: "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...was in no pomp of pride or haughtiness...but in self-abasement." Does he go on to provide his readers with an account of Jesus' silence and humility during his trial and crucifixion? This is the context he wants to present (to judge by the content of the material he does offer), but he seems to have no details about the historical event itself, for he simply quotes the entire Suffering Servant song of Isaiah 53 from start to finish, with its references to the servant "who carries the burden of our sins and suffers pain on our behalf," who "through all his ill-treatment...never opened his mouth," who "was led away like a sheep to be slaughtered."

This 'song' contains much that relates to suffering and perhaps even death, and it was the source (in other circles) of many of the details of the passion story, but it hardly makes a good substitute for the real thing. Clearly, this was the only type of repository available to Clement for information about Christ's crucifixion. Jesus' blood sacrifice was known only through scripture. For how could a Christian center of the stature of Rome, even if it had no written Gospel, not

possess *some* traditions, some details about the historical crucifixion, accurate or not. How could Clement not have wanted to make use of such details, if only as a supplement to the passage in Isaiah, which would then have served as a prophecy of the event? Indeed, we would expect him to call attention to this fact—as the evangelists and many later Christian writers were to do—that the events had fulfilled the prophecies, the passages in the sacred writings. No such idea is even hinted at.

Clement supplements Isaiah 53 with verses from Psalm 22 (7-9), another source for the Gospel scene on Calvary. Once again he introduces them as Christ himself speaking through scripture:

“And elsewhere, he himself says: ‘I am...an object of contempt to the people. All who saw me derided me, they spoke with their lips, nodding their heads and saying, He set his hopes on the Lord; let him deliver him...’ ”

These words from the Psalm are presented as Christ telling of his experiences through scripture. But again, where is the comparison with history? Did the fixation on comparing the “historical record” found in tradition and the Gospels with the “prophecies” in the Old Testament begin only after Clement? (It will be found in a very primitive form in the epistle of Barnabas.) Would one of the heads of the church at Rome, by the end of the first century, not have been aware of any tradition, such as in Matthew 27:39-43, that people witnessing Jesus’ crucifixion had, in fulfillment of prophecy, acted and spoken exactly like the words of the Psalm?

The long passage from Isaiah 53 is introduced with these words: “...as the Holy Spirit spoke (*elalêsen*) concerning him, saying...” As in Hebrews, the significance of this is evident. Clement knows Jesus was humble because the Holy Spirit, in scripture, tells him so. (Barnabas, we shall see, still shares this attitude.) The sacred writings are not the prophecy of an historical Christ’s life; history does not fulfill scripture. The quotations Clement offers are not used as “proof-texts,” confirming or illuminating historical events. History is never interpreted in the light of the scriptures, a practice later commentators such as Justin were to revel in. Rather, for Clement, scripture is itself the embodiment of the Christ event. Christ inhabits the higher spiritual world and scripture provides a window onto it. When Clement sums up in chapter 16 by saying, “See what an example we have been given” (of the Lord’s humility), he is pointing squarely to Christ’s activities in this spiritual realm as seen through the sacred writings, not to any events in Palestine some three-quarters of a century earlier, events to which he never casts a glance. The example is in scripture itself, and this Suffering Servant is equated with Christ, not a prophecy of him.

Teaching and Remembering

It should be noted that the Holy Spirit in chapter 16 “spoke” (*elalêsen*) using the same verb with which Christ was said to speak when “teaching” in chapter 13, to which we can now return. In view of the extremely limited nature of any such teaching by Jesus known to Clement, and his preponderant reliance on scripture, we are entitled to see the passage as a string of maxims which are viewed as coming from the spiritual Christ, somewhat as Paul’s “words of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:10 and 9:14) are regarded by one stream of scholarship as perceived communications from Christ in heaven. (For example, Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, p.206; Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p.127. Such scholars, of course, acknowledge these ‘dominical sayings’ of early Christian prophetic practice, but style it as communication from the “Risen Christ” after his departure from the world. But it is never presented in those terms by any epistle writer.)

A similar situation would fit the other passage (46:8) in which words are given to Jesus:

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said: ‘Woe to that man, it would have been a good thing for him if he had never been born, instead of upsetting one of my chosen ones. It would be better for him to be pitched into the sea with a millstone hung round him, than to lead a single one of my chosen astray.’ ”

This quote, similar to a conflation of Synoptic sayings (e.g., Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:42), has all the ring of an admonition thundered out by some early Christian prophet, claiming to speak in the name of Christ, or perhaps simply of God. Clement may know it from some body of inspired pronouncements, passed on as “words of the Lord Jesus.”

The idea that gods “teach” is a universal phenomenon in the world’s religions. Clement’s use of the term “when teaching” need imply no more than this. Other Christian epistles reflect this idea. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Paul says (astonishingly) that “You are taught *by God* to love one another” (my italics). In 1 John 2—possibly written around the same time as 1 Clement—the writer declares that “all knowledge” has come from the sect’s ‘anointing’ ceremony, which is the gift of “the Holy One” (God). In the Roman community, some body of teaching is now being imputed to the heavenly Christ, as reflected in Clement’s reference to “the precepts of Christ” in 49:1. We should note that in chapter 22 (quoted above) the writer presents, through the words of Psalm 34, Christ as offering to “teach”—using the same verb as in chapter 13—the fear of the Lord, and this is presented as a teaching in and through scripture. In other words, through spiritual channels from a spiritual source.

The use of the word “remember” in Clement’s introduction to these two passages is commonly claimed to be an indication of the practice of remembering and passing on the words spoken by Jesus in his ministry, and so it can be used in other literature. But such tradition and terminology could exist within any context of adhering to a body of teaching, and there seems no reason to exclude teaching proceeding from a revelatory or prophetic source. Compare two other epistle passages. In Hebrews 2:1-4, the author speaks of the revelatory experience in the sect’s past—probably marking its beginning. (That it is a revelation he is referring to and not the ministry of Jesus, I have argued in Article No 7: Transfigured on the Holy Mountain). He urges his readers to “pay heed” to what they have learned. In the 1 John passage, the readers’ knowledge, which they acquired “at the start” from the Father, is to be “kept in their hearts,” just as Clement reminds the Corinthians that Christ’s word has been “stored in their hearts.” In any case, the point may be moot. How else was Clement to express himself in these passages? In speaking of “remembering,” he is simply urging his readers to recall to mind certain teachings attributed to “the Lord Jesus” which are pertinent to the arguments he is making. There is no context of discussion about passing on tradition here, and too much is read into a simple word used in a simple manner.

It has also been noted that in those passages reputed to be the words of Christ on earth the past tense is used, whereas in other cases it is the present tense. But this overlooks the governing distinction. All other instances of “saying” by God or Christ are taken from the bible. Scripture is an ever-existing, concrete repository of ongoing revelation. The voice of Christ speaks every time they are read. Not so with ethical maxims regarded as proceeding from or revealed by Christ. They exist only in oral form, coming out of the past, presumably through supposed revelations made to someone connected with the movement, and thus the use of the past tense would be natural.

One final point in this connection. The distinction has been noted that only in the case of the two quoted words of a teaching Jesus, together with 32:2’s reference to “*kata sarka*” (to be examined later), does the identification “the Lord Jesus” appear. These are the only instances in which the word “Christ” is not used in conjunction with “Jesus.” It may be difficult to say why this particular combination of terms appears only in these cases, but two suggestions do not

commend themselves. One is that it represents a lower or more primitive christology derived from oral tradition. Yet any use of the title “Lord” cannot be spoken of as low or primitive. “Lord” is one of the titles previously given to God alone, and as such is more exalted even than “Christ” which simply means an anointed one, traditionally applied to a human figure. (This is not to say that in early Christian thought it has not been pressed into service as a name for the faith’s divine salvation figure or aspect of God.)

The second is the claim that the similarity of the maxims in chapter 13 to those of the preaching movement which produced Q (and the related earlier stratum of the Gospel of Thomas) should tie Clement’s tradition to that milieu, where the likelihood of an historical teaching Jesus is allegedly strong. But this fails to work as well. The Q tradition never speaks of its Jesus as “Lord” or “Christ.” These terms appear in neither document. Nor does that tradition speak of a salvific role for the Jesus we can see in the final stages of Q, let alone of his death and resurrection. All those elements found in 1 Clement are notably missing from the Q tradition. On the other hand, Clement lacks the prominent Q element of the Son of Man expectation, and he never expresses any of the more distinctive ethics of the Sermon on the Mount derived from Q, such as “love your enemies.”

Thus it is *less* likely that Clement stands in the line of the Q tradition. And when one considers that the maxims which appear in chapter 13 are little more than expansions on the Golden Rule, an ancient and widespread idea, such similarity to the Q dimension ceases to be either surprising or significant. Preaching of the imminent Kingdom of God was also widespread at this time.

A Chain of Apostolic Authority

But there is one important passage in 1 Clement which allegedly supports the case for the writer’s belief in an historical Jesus. It comprises an appeal to the idea of apostolic tradition, a chain of authority that began at the onset of the movement and now culminates in those leaders whom the rebels in Corinth have challenged. Clement uses this apostolic chain to argue for the illegitimacy of the rebels’ actions. Yet even in this passage there are anomalies and silences which are almost universally overlooked.

Here is the first part of chapter 42, as translated by Kirsopp Lake:

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ. In both ways, then, they were in accordance with the appointed order of God’s will. Having therefore received their commands, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with faith confirmed by the word of God, they went forth in the assurance of the Holy Spirit preaching the good news that the Kingdom of God is coming.”

1 Clement 42 is probably the earliest example in Christian correspondence of the idea of tracing authority and/or doctrine back to earlier periods in an authoritative chain. This is something that even Ignatius lacks, as do the Johannine epistles. But what is it that the writer is tracing back to?

It would be instructive to compare this passage with Revelation 1:1-3:

“This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his servants what must soon take place, and he [Christ] sent it through his angel to his servant John who, telling everything he saw, has borne witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”
[Conflating parts of the NIV and the NEB]

God makes a revelation to Jesus, who in turn communicates it through an angel to the prophet John. John, in setting it all down in writing, is passing on Christ's revelation to him. The figure of Christ communicates entirely through spiritual, revelatory channels. For John, Christ is an exclusively heavenly figure, a portrayal consistent throughout Revelation. (See Article No. 11: Revelation: The Gospel According to the Prophet John.)

If John is an apostle of the Christ, he would claim to have derived his preaching authority and message from Christ—through an angel—while Christ in his turn has received *his* message from God, both spiritual channels. I suggest that this is precisely the pattern we see in 1 Clement (a work, by the way, probably close in time to the writing of Revelation, which is most often dated in the 90s.)

Verse 42:1 says that Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The root verb “sent” is used many times throughout Christian epistles in contexts which imply a spiritual sending. It is the same verb used—including by Clement—to talk of the sending of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing in this epistle which says that Jesus preached the Kingdom of God while on earth. In fact, it is notably lacking. Verse 1 says that the apostles received their gospel from the Lord Jesus Christ in a chain clearly stated: the message passed from God to Christ, then from Christ to the apostles. The apostles go out preaching the good news as though they are the first to carry the message. There is a notable silence on any idea that such a message had previously been preached by Christ himself, to a much wider audience than the apostles themselves. God tells Christ, Christ tells the apostles, the apostles tell the world. It is the same narrow sequence as in Revelation.

And in Paul. In Galatians 1:12 Paul speaks of receiving his gospel—the gospel of God, as he and other epistle writers style it—through a revelation of Jesus Christ (which could mean “from” or “about” Christ). The Son has been revealed ‘in and through’ himself (Gal. 1:16), and he is passing it on through his preaching message. Nothing prevents us from interpreting Clement’s meaning in the same revelatory way, especially as at the beginning of the next chapter he proceeds to eradicate any sense of a physical commissioning of the apostles by Jesus in his ministry: “And what wonder is it if those who were in Christ, and were entrusted by God with such a duty, established those who have been mentioned?”

First of all, the phrase “in Christ” is suspiciously like the Pauline motif “in/through Christ” which (regardless of whether one believes he knew an historical Jesus or not) meant the spiritual presence of the heavenly Christ within people or situations. It is very suggestive of the mystical cult atmosphere found in Paul, which I maintain is devoid of an historical Jesus. More importantly, if the writer of 1 Clement just had in mind Jesus’ commissioning of the apostles, either during his ministry or following the resurrection in flesh, it is hardly likely he would have reverted to saying that the apostles were “entrusted by God” with their mission. If, however, Christ were simply a spiritual force acting as God’s channel, and not the object of human memory, expressing things this way would be understandable.

Christ's Resurrection

Before pursuing Clement’s chain of authority argument further, let’s go back to the idea of the resurrection, as alluded to in 42:3. Most translations, of course, assume the Gospel background and imply that the apostles went out to preach full of encouragement having just witnessed Jesus’ return from the grave. But is this overlooking a more natural meaning in the text itself? The verb for “fully assured” (*plêrophorêô*) implies “filled with confidence, faith, determination, etc.” (colloquially, “pumped up”), but it is followed by the preposition “*dia*” which means “on account of, by reason of”). This is general enough to make possible the meaning that the apostles were filled with confidence at the thought of the resurrection, in the

sense of an article of faith. In fact, this is the sense in which Ignatius uses this verb and idea in the opening of his epistle to the Philadelphians, where he says that his readers “have sure and certain conviction in the resurrection of our Lord”; and it is used in the same sense in the enumeration of Jesus’ biographical elements in Magnesians 11.

But there is more to support the meaning of ‘convinced by faith.’ Following on the statement that the apostles are “fully assured by/on account of the resurrection,” the writer adds that they are “filled with faith in the word of God.” What is it that they feel an assured belief in, if not the resurrection just referred to? That such a thing is designated “the word of God” would indicate that this is in fact an article of faith, the product of revelation, and not something known through eyewitness. (This second phrase has been curiously dropped from Staniforth’s Penguin translation.)

Paul, too, confesses his and others’ conviction of Jesus’ resurrection in terms suggesting faith, not historical eyewitness, as in Romans 10:9 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14. And in 1 Corinthians 15:12-15, in urging the assurance of resurrection on his readers, Paul declares that if there is no general resurrection, then Christ himself cannot have been raised, and he and other apostles have been lying about what God has said. This implies that the source of what Paul preaches about the resurrection of Jesus has come from God, not from history and tradition. In other words, it is an article of faith, revealed from divine sources.

The whole passage in 1 Clement 42:1-3 seems to be saying this: the apostles, having received the gospel, by (spiritual) revelation from God through Christ, and pumped up by the thought of the resurrection of Christ and fully believing God’s word (through revelation or scripture) that it was true, set out to preach to the world (which hears it for the first time) the coming Kingdom of God.

Appointment of Apostles

After saying that the apostles had gone out, having been “entrusted by God” to preach the Kingdom, Clement goes on to provide further evidence that he intended no picture of Christ commissioning apostles during an earthly ministry. The main purpose of Clement’s letter is to impress upon the rebel Corinthians that they must accept the authority of their appointed elders, and he marshals all manner of evidence, mostly drawn from scripture, to support the principle of this authority. While there may be some distinction of roles between appointed apostles and appointed bishops and deacons, this passage (chapters 42-44) is one in which Clement is addressing the concept of delegation—from God through Christ to the apostles. The flow of thought, right up to 44:3, indicates that the God-Christ-apostles chain is being extended through the apostles’ appointment of bishops and deacons in the communities they converted. Clement goes on to search for a sacred foundation for the legitimacy of these appointments. He finds a foundation and precedent in the books of Moses and the prophets, where those figures under divine guidance set down instructions for such proceedings. For proof that appointment of church ministers is inviolable, Clement has recourse to Moses’ appointment of Aaron and a prophecy in Isaiah.

But a missing precedent should be evident: the record of Jesus’ personal appointment of the Twelve (or however many) and their authority to do everything in his name. Where are the words he would have spoken on such an occasion—even if developed in later church imagination? Where is Matthew’s directive to Peter himself—supposedly the first bishop of Clement’s own community, which would have seized on any such tradition—that here was the rock upon which the church was to be built, giving Peter powers to bind and loose? If the Roman community possessed no tradition of the dramatic appointment of Peter (because it was an

invention of the Matthean evangelist and his community somewhere in Syria, and perhaps at this time not yet set down on paper), I have argued earlier that the Roman church should not have failed to preserve or develop specific traditions concerning Jesus' teachings and directives, and this would include an appointment of apostles. The very occurrence of situations which this epistle addresses would guarantee such a thing.

Even given the technical distinctions between apostles and community leaders, one would think that such precedents as these, such foundations of authority, would have struck Clement as pertinent and would have accompanied his scriptural arguments. The bare reference in chapter 42 will not do, as we have already seen; further, because there are none of the particulars we would expect if this represented a tradition of appointment on earth by Jesus. Look at the details Clement supplies in the matter of Moses in the next chapter.

Finally, Clement rounds off his discussion here (chapter 44) with this statement: "Our apostles also knew, through (*dia*) our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be dissensions over the title of bishop." This would be an odd way of expressing the idea that Jesus during his ministry or resurrection appearances had given the apostles this forecast, but perfectly natural if the meaning is of a revelation gained from the spiritual Christ. As Lightfoot points out (*The Apostolic Fathers*, vol.1, p.398), "*dia*" is frequently used by Clement to denote the mediatorial channel which Christ in heaven represents; "*dia toutou*" (through him) occurs five times in chapter 36 alone with precisely this meaning. The plain sense of the statement quoted above in 44:1 is one of communication from the heavenly Jesus. If so, since it ties itself (through the word *kai*) to what has come previously, this casts the same meaning back upon the entire discussion about the apostles and their commission from God through Christ. We may say that given such a meaning, no thought of an historical Jesus can be present in the writer's mind, for the first apostles of Christ were not likely to have been characterized as being appointed in any other way than by the earthly Jesus himself.

A century ago, bishop Lightfoot, a British clerical scholar, made this perceptive comment (*op.cit.*, p.398): "To Clement Jesus is not a dead man whose memory is reverently cherished or whose precepts are carefully observed, but an ever living, ever active Presence, who enters into all the vicissitudes of Clement's being." What Lightfoot is saying, inadvertently, is that there is no sign in Clement's mind of the historical Jesus who said and did things in the past, no sign of a now-dead human being who was supposedly the foundation of his present faith. For Clement and his predecessors, Jesus was no historical person but an ever-living spiritual being who provides a channel to God and the means for salvation. Deities in heaven have ever filled this role, and until the Gospels came along, this Son of the Jewish God in the spiritual realm was all anyone believed in or needed.

That said, one should reemphasize the observation made earlier, that Clement's thoughts and emotions are mainly theocentric, and that Lightfoot may be exaggerating the role Jesus plays for the writer of this epistle. After outlining all the promises and indicators that the Creator has supplied to give us assurance of resurrection (26), Clement's devotion and love remain on God, and are expressed for him alone: "Seeing then that we have this hope, let us knit fast our souls to him who is ever true to his word and righteous in his judgements...let us rekindle the ardour of our belief in him..." And only a few verses later (29), it is God "we must approach...in holiness of spirit, lifting up pure and undefiled hands to him in love for the gracious and compassionate Father who has chosen us to be his own." Even in the little 'ode' to love in chapter 49, which echoes 1 Corinthians 13, the writer speaks only of "love for God," and that "love binds us fast to God," while the passage at the end of this chapter, the only seeming reference in the epistle to Christ's love for us, is in fact grammatically ambiguous, and may be saying, "...because of the love *he* [God, as God is the only one hitherto referred to] bore us, our Lord Jesus Christ, at the

will of God, gave his blood for us, flesh [*sarx*] for our flesh, his life [*psychê*, literally, soul] for our lives.”

“*Kata Sarka*”

This reference to “flesh” will lead us to consider one further passage in 1 Clement. Those who maintain that the writer does indeed envision an historical Jesus say it constitutes a fly in the ointment. Verse 32:2 refers back to the reference to Jacob in the preceding chapter:

“For it is from him [Jacob] that all the priests and Levites who minister at God’s altar have since descended. From him, too, according to the flesh, has come the Lord Jesus. From him there have issued kings and princes and rulers, in the line of descent from Judah.”
Actually, none of the English words of descent or coming appear in the Greek, which is literally “From him, the priests/Lord Jesus/kings and princes...” The reference to Jesus is a bare one: “From him, according to the flesh [*kata sarka*], the Lord Jesus.” Again, let’s consider the nature of this statement. It makes no perceivable connection to the Gospel figure, and its context is scriptural. And once again, it uses that curiously stereotyped and cryptic phrase found throughout early Christian correspondence: *kata sarka* or *en sarki*, or sometimes just the dative *sarki*: “in, according to, in relation to,” perhaps even “in the realm of, the flesh.” (See the discussion on this terminology and its appearances in the epistles in *The Sound of Silence*: Appendix.)

Beginning in Ignatius and coming to full flower in Justin and just about everyone beyond, discussion of Jesus and his life is put in unmistakably human, historical terms, based on the Gospels. The phrase “*kata sarka*” is no longer pressed into service. What force, what mode of thinking, led every earlier letter writer to speak of Jesus, a more vivid and recent figure in their past than he was to men like Justin, in such an obscure and non-committal way, devoid of all sense of circulating historical tradition? We might accept it as a quirk of expression if such a thing stood beside other, more natural expressions of a recent human figure and his life story. But this is all we get, from Paul and the christological hymns, to 1 Clement at the end of the century, and even beyond.

In Romans 1:3, the Son is “*kata sarka*” of David’s stock, which Paul identifies as part of the gospel of God about his Son found in the prophets. In Romans 9:5, the reference is almost identical to that in 1 Clement: “and from whom [the patriarchs] the Christ, according to the flesh [*kata sarka*].” In the hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16 (which may be earlier than the rest of the epistle), the “mystery” of the faith is that Christ Jesus was “manifested/ revealed in flesh [*en sarki*]” with no other activities on earth stated. Even in referring to “the days of his flesh” in Hebrews 5:7, Christ’s activities are based on scripture. 1 Peter 3:18 has Christ “put to death in the flesh [*sarki*]”—and raised “in the spirit,” as does the 1 Timothy hymn. (1 Peter, as in 1 Clement 16, describes Christ’s sufferings (2:22) by paraphrasing Isaiah 53, silent on any historical traditions found in the Gospels.)

This strange and universal pattern of expression in almost the first hundred years of Christian letter writing (and more formal treatises like Hebrews) cannot be dismissed out of hand. It is part of a clearly perceptible evolution throughout the documentary record from silence on a human, Gospel figure to the gradual integration of such a figure and story into Christian thinking. In the earliest period, the use of a phrase like “*kata sarka*” represented a philosophical concept. It refers to the theoretical state which divinities inhabited or entered when they performed their work of redemption, when they lived out the elements of their myths. “Flesh” and “spirit” were the great opposites within the view of the universe held during the centuries dominated by Platonism and other mystical philosophies. The former was the world of humanity, the latter the realm of Deity. The whole tradition of myth said that certain gods and supernatural beings in their dealings with

humanity took on human form—sometimes it is explicitly stated that it is only a “likeness” to that form—and underwent human-like activities. In any system where the saving deity suffered, he had to leave the more spiritual layers of heaven and do so within a human setting. For the early Christians, “flesh” was the commonest designation for that setting, but this encompassed a number of the universe’s levels, including the lowest spirit layer of the air, which possessed characteristics very like the level of matter and were inhabited by evil spirits with corporeal type ‘bodies.’ (These matters are discussed at length, with references, in Articles No. 3 and No. 8.)

In early Christian circles, a further element was introduced and this was the Jewish scriptures. The concept of a divine “Messiah” had evolved out of this body of writing and tradition, and aspects of such a figure in scripture had to be applied to the new savior god Christ Jesus: thus, all these “descents” from David or the patriarchs or the line of Judah, or even from the “woman” of Isaiah 7:14. In the early literature, when Christ comes to the “sphere of flesh” he does only what scripture tells of him. To convey the idea, the stock formula “*kata sarka*” and its variants was apparently developed, woolly at best because it had no historical foundation on which to base itself. But it conformed to that flesh/spirit dichotomy of prevailing thought about the workings of the universe. And the phrase itself is ambiguous enough that it could encompass the connotation of referring to acts that have an *effect* on the human dimension, so that in some instances it may entail only the thought of being or acting “in relation to the flesh.” This more general application is seen in Paul’s use of *kata sarka* in 2 Corinthians 5:16 (in the NEB translation): “With us, therefore, *worldly standards* have ceased to count in our estimation of any man...” As well as of Christ, whose “flesh” here is not in view.

Postscript: Could 1 Clement Be a Mid-Second Century ‘Forgery’?

Since the days of the Dutch Radicals (such as W. C. Van Manen), the ‘authenticity’ of 1 Clement has been called into question, much more than in regard to its author or specific occasion. While the letter purports to be a reaction by a Roman community to vicissitudes in Corinth, such alternate interpretations regard it as something written at a later date, 140 to 160 perhaps, using the scenario of discord at Corinth to provide a homily with a different, broader agenda. That agenda is seen as relating to the issue of authority, and is most often characterized as reflecting the Roman Church’s developing ambition to exercise some form of authority over the wider Christian community.

In the convoluted world of early Christianity and its complex documentary record, one has to admit that almost anything is possible. Cases have been made for the mid-second century provenance of 1 Clement, and it would be foolhardy to say that they have no merit. Thus, I am not going to argue at length over the issue here, but simply offer observations that lead me to believe it is unlikely.

First, if the letter is not what is presented on the surface, an “agenda” must be in mind. Whatever that agenda is thought to be, there must be fairly obvious indicators in the text which throw a spotlight on it. If the ‘forger’ intends his creation as support for a claim of authority by some body such as the Roman church, the elements in the letter which argue this cannot be so subtle as to be virtually undistinguishable. And we know from experience that Christian forgers and interpolators are rarely subtle, which is why their handiwork is usually so easily identifiable. The issues and agendas they are addressing are right there in plain view (as, for example, in the Pastorals). In 1 Clement, the issue of some centralized authority beyond the appointed elders of any individual community is nowhere in evidence.

No mention is made of the rebels in Corinth submitting to an outside group; guidance is all that is being offered by the writer. He focuses on the “rivalry and dissension” (63) within the

Corinthian community, not on any failure to render obedience to some larger network. The epistle never implies that Corinth owes fidelity to Rome. In 56:1, the writer urges that the rebels “surrender themselves, not to us but to the will of God.” In chapter 65, the writer is praying for “news of the truce and unity” in Corinth, nothing else. He has certainly made his epistle one of unconscionable length and repetition of its main themes, but there is no compelling reason to see this as any more than an expression of his own volubility, along with perhaps a measure of vanity in demonstrating his knowledge of scripture.

If even the subtlest agenda advancing Roman authority were in the mind of the writer, we would surely not encounter the situation we see in chapter 5. Later Roman claims were heavily based on Peter and Paul’s precedent in having come to Rome, both of them to be martyred there, the former to become its first bishop and establish a chain of authority that would culminate in the Papacy. But Clement, in discussing Peter and Paul’s activities, is maddeningly vague, if not completely silent, on such later traditions. He does not even state clearly that either of these apostles ended their lives in martyrdom, and certainly there is no mention of Rome as the place of such events. In fact, his statement that “after reaching the furthest limits of the West, and bearing his testimony before kings and rulers, he passed out of this world...” might even imply that the legend of Paul as it then stood was that he had died in the distant west of the empire. There is no sense that Clement is familiar with the last days of Paul as portrayed in Acts.

As for Peter, the writer’s failure to play up any martyrdom in Rome, and his complete silence on any connection of the apostle to that city, let alone that he had been its first bishop, not only belies later Petrine tradition on such things, it makes it impossible to believe that this writer has any concept of Roman hegemony, since Peter’s role in support of this would be something he could not have passed up. In this connection, we should note Ignatius’ silence on any linkage of Peter and Paul to Rome in his epistle to the Romans (4:3), even when he refers to them by name while discussing his impending martyrdom. In fact, the contrast he draws between himself and those illustrious figures virtually rules out the later traditions about their martyrdom. “They were apostles, and I am a condemned criminal,” is not something he would likely have said if both Peter and Paul met the same kind of fate (execution) in Rome which Ignatius is on his way to. “They were free men, and I am still a slave,” (the latter not meant literally) makes no sense if both men were no freer than Ignatius in the concluding stages of their lives.

Second, the lack of reference—indeed, knowledge, as I have argued—concerning an historical Jesus in the epistle of Clement, makes it difficult to place it in the mid-second century, especially in a community such as Rome. Even though the record of the second century, from Apostolic Fathers to apologists, indicates that acceptance of an historical Jesus progressed gradually and unevenly, if any community was at the forefront of that development, it was Rome. Justin testifies to that, and so does everything we think we know about Marcion. He came to Rome sometime around 140, adopted a gnostic view of Jesus and formed what was probably the first canon of documents (ten epistles of Paul and an Ur-Luke) to make his case about Jesus’ preaching of the true God. And since the Roman scene, as the mid-second century arrived, was characterized by the Marcion-orthodoxy conflict, any letter written at that time with a ‘hidden’ agenda would surely have wanted to focus on the burning issue of the day, perhaps purporting to find ammunition from the earlier period to counter Marcion’s gnostic threat. Of the latter, there is not a hint in 1 Clement.

One of the issues in the struggle with Marcion and gnosticism was that between the principle of ecclesiastical authority and the less-structured attitudes of gnostic spirituality and individual self-reliance, but even of this no sign can be detected in Clement. The rebel community is not one that resists authority structures in principle, since the community was previously in harmony; there is no sign that any faction come out of a different background, and the writer

does not argue from the perspective of conflict with gnostic standards (as Paul might be said to do in parts of his Corinthian epistles). To observe that 1 Clement's advocacy of appointed authority in the community is general enough to apply to a range of situations, and that it was indeed used in the later second century to support orthodox positions, does not demonstrate that it was designed to do so, especially when the specifics of those situations are conspicuously absent.

There is no particular reason to believe that the epistle was later written in some more distant Christian community, one that was far from these issues and from the knowledge of an historical Jesus, with the letter being cast in the Rome to Corinth scenario simply as a vehicle. But even if this were so, it would still mean that the only 'agenda' in view would be the one the letter puts forward: obey the elders in your community who have been appointed over you. Since this would involve no issue of centralized authority beyond the community itself, and since the picture of that communal hierarchy is a primitive one, nowhere near the "monarchical bishop" model we find later (or even the one advocated by Ignatius), there would be no compelling reason to date such a 'forgery' to the mid-second century. Such an epistle could as easily come from the end of the preceding century, even if we are not in a position to prove it.

Thus, whether the epistle is what it purports to be, or is simply someone else's homily on community harmony and government cast in a Rome-to-Corinth setting, nothing changes in our analysis of the epistle and its knowledge of an historical Jesus. Since the more primitive nature of its environment and thought would tend to mitigate against a later provenance, there seems little justification in rejecting it as providing a window onto the period under examination.

— II —

The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas is the longest and probably least familiar surviving Christian document before Justin. It seems to have taken shape over a few decades in the early second century, involving perhaps three different authors. Editing is evident and ideas are not always consistent throughout. Later tradition identified the author as "Hermas" (the name given to the recipient of the visions), who was regarded as the brother of Pius, bishop of Rome around 148 CE. But most if not all of the work was likely written before that time. Some scholars have even placed it in the late first century, which would fit its primitive theology and predominantly Jewish character.

F. L. Cross, for example (*The Early Church Fathers*, p.24), dates the Shepherd to the end of the first century, due to its crude theology, undeveloped church organization and the overall primitiveness of the work. R. M. Grant (*The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*, p.85) notes that the Muratorian list's assignment of the work to the bishopric of Pius after 140 "does not explain how Pius could be bishop of Rome if presbyters and bishops were practically identical and those called presbyters governed the church." He subscribes to the view that the Shepherd is a composite work, with earlier parts coming soon after the accession of Trajan (97 CE). Simon Tugwell (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p.63) agrees that the post-140 dating is problematic and opts for the 60s or 70s of the first century. All of them accept a Roman provenance.

The work is a series of revelations to Hermas by angelic and other celestial figures. One of these is "the shepherd," angel of repentance, which gives the writing its name. The book is divided into three large sections: 5 Visions, 12 Commandments, and 10 Parables. The genre is apocalyptic. The author's central concern is the question of sin after baptism: is forgiveness

available to Christians for sins committed following their conversion? Hermas argues that repentance is still possible—though only once.

This is indeed a strange Christian document. For all its length, the names of Jesus and Christ are never used. (The sole appearance of “Christ” in one manuscript of the second Vision, in 2:8, is thought to be a later emendation of “Lord”—meaning God—which appears in other manuscripts of the passage.) Instead, the writer refers to the “Son of God.” He is by no means the central figure, however; once again, this is a thoroughly theocentric piece of writing. “Lord” is always God. The author speaks of glorifying the name of God (Vision 3, 4:3); those who suffer persecution do so for the name of God (Vision 3, 5:2). It is the ordinances of God which must be kept (Vision 1, 1:6).

It is difficult to believe that this author could have possessed any sense of a Jesus on earth who began the Christian movement. Hermas treats the “church,” the body of believers, as a mystical entity. It is God himself who has created the church (Vision 1, 1:6), including its pre-existent prototype in heaven. There is constant reference to the “elect of God,” with no tradition in sight of a church established by Jesus. Nothing which could fit the Gospel ministry is referred to. The central section, the Commandments (or Mandates), discusses a great number of moral rules, some resembling the teachings of the Gospels, but to Jesus no attribution is ever made. The writer can speak of “apostles,” but never associate them with an historical figure who appointed them; there is no tradition of anything going back to such a figure. Instead, “apostles and teachers preach the name of the Son of God” (Parable 9, 16:5), in the same way that Paul and other Christian prophets preached the divine Christ.

The Son in the Shepherd

And who or what is the Son? The writer describes him in highly mystical language. He is older than all creation, the Father’s counselor (Parable 9, 12:1). He “supports the whole world” (14:5). Parable 9 tells of the building of a heavenly tower representing the church. The Son is the foundation rock and the gate; one cannot enter this tower, this Kingdom of God, except through his Son. All this is a reflection of that underlying concept encountered at every turn throughout the early Christian period: that God is known and accessible only through his emanations, through the intermediary Son. Salvation comes to those who are “called through his Son” (Parable 8, 11:1). Of a death and resurrection there is not a whisper in the entire document.

This Son, Parable 9 goes on to tell, “was made manifest” in the last days of the world: “*phaneros egeneto*,” he became known. Once again we meet the universal language of the earliest Christian writers: not a coming to earth to live a life as a human being in recent history, but a revelation by God today, in these last times before the End.

Hermas equates the Son with the Holy Spirit (Parable 9, 1:1, and in Parable 5 which we shall examine in detail below). This is the more traditional Jewish manner of speaking of the communicating aspect of God. Elsewhere (Parable 8, 3:2), it is the Jewish Law that is God’s Son. This writer has no sense of a Son with a distinct personality, biography or role separate from longstanding ways of thinking about God’s dealings with the world. He is part of the paraphernalia of heaven, the way Wisdom is in other circles of Jewish expression.

The Parable of the Son

Let’s take a closer look at the fifth Parable. Commentators claim to see an account both of the incarnation and of the ministry of Jesus. An angel has told Hermas a parable in which the servant of a rich landowner is given charge to tend a field. As the angel explains it, the field is the world,

the landowner God, and the servant is the Son of God who labored in this field for the benefit of its plantings, the people of God. In chapter 6 the angel goes on to further elucidate the parable this way (K. Lake, in the Loeb *Apostolic Fathers*, volume 2):

“2God planted the vineyard, that is, created the people, and gave it over to his Son. And the Son...cleansed their sins, laboring much and undergoing much toil... 3When, therefore, he had cleansed the sins of the people, he showed them the ways of life and gave them the law which he received from his Father... 4But listen why the Lord took his Son and the glorious angels as counselors concerning the heritage [or heirs: see below] of the Servant. 5The Holy Spirit...did God make to dwell in the flesh which he willed [or chose]. This flesh in which the Holy Spirit dwelled served the Spirit well, walking in holiness and purity, and did not in any way defile the Spirit. 6When, therefore, it had lived nobly and purely, and had labored with the Spirit...he [God] chose it as companion with the Holy Spirit; for the conduct of this flesh pleased him, because it was not defiled while it was bearing the Holy Spirit on earth. 7Therefore he took the Son and the glorious angels as counselors, that this flesh, having served the Spirit blamelessly, should have some place of sojourn and not lose the reward of its service. For all flesh in which the Holy Spirit has dwelt shall receive a reward if it be found undefiled and spotless.”

F. L. Cross (*op.cit.*, p.26) has called the author of the Shepherd “a man of no great intelligence,” and all who have studied this work speak of its “confusion.” The writing is often unclear, to say the least, and in this particular Parable there is a striking inconsistency between the parable itself and the explanation of it, which we need not go into. Even in the above passage there are obscurities between the Son, the Servant and the Holy Spirit which make analysis difficult. But let’s focus on some key points.

If the author is familiar with even a general concept of Jesus’ historical life and death, why in verse 3 does the Son’s “cleansing of the sins of the people” *precede* his “showing them the ways of life and giving them the Law”? The “cleansing” is through the labor and toil spoken of in verse 2, but neither here nor anywhere else is this put in terms of suffering and atonement, let alone a death and resurrection. As for “giving them the Law,” this is clearly through spiritual channels, for a later Parable states that the angel Michael (who in Parable 9 is equated with the Son of God) has “put the Law into the hearts of those who believe.” There is no preaching by an historical Son in evidence anywhere in this work, and in the above Parable such things as vineyards and toil are best seen as a symbolic description of the workings of God through his intermediaries.

To find a reference to the incarnation in verses 5 to 7 is to draw water from a stone. First of all, despite an identification of the Son with the Holy Spirit in Parable 9 (which is often regarded as a later layer of this work by a different writer), there is in Parable 5 no obvious link between the Son and the Spirit; in fact, verses 4 and 7a make them distinct. It seems, therefore, that it was not the Son who was sent to dwell in flesh. Verse 7 further fails to link the Son with the “flesh” under discussion. In any event, the manner in which this flesh is spoken of cannot fit an incarnate Christ’s human side, unless it be given a peculiarly gnostic interpretation which is nowhere in evidence in this book. Instead, it has a decidedly ‘human’ character, in the sense that the writer is speaking here of ordinary human beings.

Thus, there is no thought of incarnation in this passage. The writer is speaking of the Holy Spirit being sent by God to dwell in certain humans. Such men and women are those who stay pure and holy, who do not defile the Spirit while it dwells in them; they will be given a place of sojourn as a reward. The “all flesh” of verse 7b shows that the writer does not have the specific flesh of an incarnate Christ in mind. Besides, Christ’s human side hardly enjoys a continued existence after his incarnation so that it can be given a reward.

Such an interpretation requires one simple adjustment. In verse 4, Lake and others give the word “*klêronomia*” the usual translation of “heritage” or “inheritance” as though the writer is about to detail the fate of the servant who in the parable is identified as the Son. But as Bauer’s *Lexicon* points out, a word like this can be given an abstract translation, so that here it may signify those who receive the inheritance. In other words, the writer is about to describe the rewards received by the *heirs* of the servant/Son, namely the believers in whom God has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell.

This interpretation is hardly a leap of faith or wishful thinking. For the writer in the next chapter (7) goes on to spell it out for us. I need only quote part of the first three verses:

“Listen, now,” (the angel) said. “Guard this flesh of yours, pure and undefiled, that the Spirit which dwells in it may bear it witness, and your flesh may be justified... For if you defile your flesh you defile also the Holy Spirit, and if you defile the flesh you shall not live.”

Only the need to find some trace of Christian orthodoxy somewhere in this book would lead to a failure to make the obvious connection between these verses and the meaning of those which have immediately preceded them. Nor does the writer give us any indication that he is drawing some kind of parallel between the believers and the incarnated Christ. The “flesh” spoken of in chapter 6 is not that of Christ on earth, but of the believers whom the writer is addressing. In sum, the longest early Christian document in existence presents us with a divine Son who is never referred to by the names Jesus or Christ, is never said to have died or risen, and who never shows sign of having been to earth.

The “confusion” the scholars speak of in *Hermas* is not that of the author but rather is a product of the attempt to impose the Gospel background on him. This writer is rooted in Hellenistic-Jewish mythology with its picture of a heaven in which different forces form part of the workings of divinity. The Son is one figure in the class photo which includes the Holy Spirit and angels of several ranks, and these are occasionally allowed to merge into one another. The Son sometimes seems identified with other figures, and angels such as Michael are at times involved in the work of redemption. As Charles Talbert puts it (“The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity,” *New Testament Studies* 1975, p.432), “the Savior is described basically in terms of an angelology which has coalesced with the categories of Son and Spirit.” Talbert’s choice of the word “category” is perceptive, for *Hermas* is dealing with philosophical concepts here, not a historical figure who was God’s incarnation. Had he possessed any idea of the Son as a human personality who had walked the earth in recent memory, suffered and died and resurrected to redeem humanity, he could never have buried him in this densely obscure heavenly construct and allowed the entire picture ‘recorded’ in the Gospels to evaporate into the mystical wind.

At the Threshold

As we stand on the threshold of historical awareness of a human Jesus, we can look back over a consistent picture. Amid much variation, the early Christian documents lying outside the Gospels and Q display a common denominator: a spiritual divine Son who acts as God’s intermediary in the work of saving humankind or an elect portion of it. They are consistent in their view of the medium through which this work is done: an ongoing realm of the spirit which inspires apostles and teachers to impart the divine truth. The Shepherd of *Hermas* is perhaps the best example to show that this was an age saturated with mystical thinking and heavenly imaginings. This is how religious minds saw the world around them. To ignore that consistency, that common picture, to fail to account for universally missing elements like apostolic tradition going back to Jesus, or an historical ministry which served as the ultimate source of Christian

teaching and prophecy, to seek to paper over the widespread absence of any concept of death and resurrection and so much else, is simply a burying of the head in sand.

Our picture of early Christian diversity, when looked at with eyes unobscured by orthodox lenses, provides a fascinating view onto the religious world of the first and early second centuries, an amalgam of a Judaism which has stepped adventurously beyond its mainstream paths, and a Hellenism which has brought its established philosophy into a Jewish embrace. (It matters not whether these adventurers were Jew or Greek.) Such syncretism still inhabits a rich spiritual realm. The Shepherd is not the only Christian or Jewish writing to lay before us a world of angels, heavenly churches, celestial figures representing forces between God's heaven and man's earth, a universe where vibrations from the unseen spiritual side of reality can be felt by the mystic, absorbed by the believer, sought and discovered in the sacred writings from whose pages God, his emanations and his messengers speak. Until we can allow ourselves an unbiased reading of what lies plainly in view in the early Christian documents, we will deny ourselves a proper knowledge of that important transitional period in the religious evolution of the western world which led to the modern era of faith in an incarnated Son who trod the land of Palestine.

The Son's journey to earth was inevitable, perhaps, for western society is the human branch most responsible for developing science, beginning with the Greeks, and science requires substance in matter, things observable in a tangible universe. Western philosophy and religion could not long subsist on a diet of pure spirit, on myth which never touched real ground. That offspring of Judaism and Hellenism needed to embrace a Son in flesh, to touch his wounds and see the love and sacrifice in his eyes. Ignatius craved his violent end in the arena because he saw it as a parallel to the real suffering of a human Christ under Pontius Pilate, and his fury at those who denied a genuine suffering Christ in the flesh came from the fear that without such a thing, his own fate would be meaningless and "for nothing." That view, that need, is still with us today. And so in the space of a few critical decades around the turn of the second century the human Jesus crystallized out of his spiritual predecessor, though it would take the better part of a century before all Christian circles were converted. By the time of Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, our hybrid western religion had completed its creation and for the next eighteen centuries the new church was to preserve the "memory" of the Son who had lived and worked among us.

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In the second part of this article, we will go on to cross the threshold itself, and view the new coalescing landscape through the eyes of the writer of the epistle of Barnabas and the letters of Ignatius.

Part Two: The Epistles of Barnabas and Ignatius

— III —

The Epistle of Barnabas

An Emerging Jesus of History

For the document known as the Epistle of Barnabas, most scholars prefer a date between 115 and 132, though some have placed it before the end of the first century. Kirsopp Lake summarizes the two positions (Loeb *Apostolic Fathers*, vol.1., p.337), that the ten kings in chapter 6 may refer to emperors, which would place the epistle within the first century, though at a date uncertain since “there is no unanimity as to the exact manner in which the number of the ten Emperors is to be reached.” The later choice of date, often specified as close to 130, is based on the reference to an expected—apparently imminent—rebuilding of the Temple (16:3-4). While such a hope may have flared up at various times during this period, it was at its height on the eve of the Second Jewish War. While the writer mentions the first War (making the document no earlier than 70), he fails to refer to the second, which should place the upper limit at 132.

The traditional ascription of the epistle in ancient times to Paul’s companion Barnabas is rejected today. Where it was written is uncertain, though Rome is not likely. It seems to be the product of “a learned Jew” (Staniforth’s phrase), quite possibly in Alexandria, since its earliest attestation is by Clement and Origen in that city. If so, this Jew has disowned his ancestral religion and claimed the sacred writings of the Jewish heritage for Christianity. Others have suggested that he is a gentile writing to other gentiles who have thoroughly absorbed Judaism and who see themselves as the inheritors of a new covenant which the Jews have forfeited.

It would perhaps be easy to characterize this epistle as one which reflects a primitive knowledge of the historical Jesus of the Gospels, something which would not be surprising of a document that may have been written as late as the second or third decade of the second century. But closer examination calls this into question, and it will be fascinating to look at this epistle to see just how far the picture of a Christ derived from the sacred writings could develop before it ruptured its scriptural skin and spilled into actual history. The impression created by the epistle of Barnabas suggests one of those moments in movies and television where one scene starts to fade out and simultaneously a new scene fades in. The clash of worlds is at times almost bizarre.

Viewing the Old Testament books as prophecy, the writer of this epistle has progressed to the point where he envisions Christ as having lived on earth at some time in the past. But as to exactly when that was, or even about the few details offered by Ignatius, he gives us no information. His sole source for an account of that newly-conceived Incarnation in historical flesh still seems to be scripture.

In this polemic against all things Jewish, “Barnabas” accuses the Jews of failing to understand their own writings. (They were misled by an evil angel.) They were guilty of making a literal interpretation of scripture instead of an allegorical one. The latter made it clear that the Old Testament, the rites and regulations of the Jewish Law, were entirely God’s coded prophecy about Christ and his cross. This epistle is an attempt to demonstrate this contention, employing a range of exegesis which is both imaginative and occasionally ludicrous.

A Picture of Christ's Passion

The crucifixion and its significance lies at the very center of the author's theology. What does he tell us about it? He touches on some details that could be said to be related to the Gospel story, but in every case he points to scripture as the source of his information. Not only does he not possess a written Gospel (very telling if we are to date Barnabas a fair distance into the second century), he shows no sign of any access to oral traditions which supply an account of Jesus' historical experiences.

Consider the opening verse of chapter 5. (My translations are based on Staniforth in the Penguin edition, but with occasional changes in the direction of the literal Greek.)

"Now, when the Lord [i.e., Jesus] resigned himself to deliver his body to destruction, the aim he had in view was to sanctify us by the remission of our sins...For what scripture says of him is: 'he was wounded on account of our transgressions, and bruised because of our sins, and by his scars we were healed. He was led to the slaughter like a sheep, and like a lamb that is dumb before its shearers.' "

This idea of dying to remit sins could have been illustrated by Mark 10:45, that "the Son of Man...(came) to surrender his life as a ransom for many," surely a representative tradition in any interpretation of Jesus' death. It is difficult to believe that any Christian community would not by now have possessed *some* tradition, some saying of Jesus himself, which related to the significance of his sacrifice on the cross.

Other references to the passion suggest a very imperfect picture of its outline, often at odds with the Gospel story. In a 'description' of Jesus' sufferings, Barnabas appeals to the prophets of the Old Testament, quoting ten examples in all, beginning at 5:13:

"Even the actual form of his Passion he willingly embraced, since the word of prophecy had doomed him to meet his death on a tree. 'Spare my life from the sword,' it said; and then, 'Pierce my body with nails, for the congregation of the wicked have risen up against me.' And again he says, 'See, I have tendered my back to scourgings and my cheeks to blows, and I have set my face as firm as a rock.' " (Quotations are from Psalms 22 and 119 and Isaiah 50.)

Barnabas then goes on:

"Moreover, after he had done as it was commanded him, what does he say then? 'Who presumes to accuse me? Let him stand up to face me...' "

In Barnabas' sequence, the false accusations, which we would associate with the trial portion of the passion story, follow after the biblical passages representing the crucifixion itself. After this further quote from Isaiah 50, he goes on to offer other passages which in the Gospel tradition are not associated with the passion, focusing for example on the reference in Isaiah 28 to the foundation stone that becomes a cornerstone. Following this, he dips back into Psalm 22: "A gathering of wicked men surrounded me; they came about me like bees round a honeycomb," and also, 'they cast lots for my garments.' "

This chain of biblical prophetic passages creates a hodge-podge impression, completely out of sequence with the Gospel story, and indeed conveying no sequential picture at all, certainly not one which the writer might be associating in his mind with an historical scene. Rather, his mind is focused on the 'story line' in the Psalms and prophets. And like Clement he hears the voice of Jesus in the first person words of the prophets and Psalmists. Barnabas' 'account' of an historical crucifixion seems to be determined solely by scripture. We wait in vain for any spelling out of the corresponding event in history, events of the time of Herod and Pontius Pilate. No such historical time or figures are ever provided.

This silence is repeated all through the epistle. Barnabas never supplements his scriptural quotations with a corresponding historical version of things. This creates a curious effect. Though he regards scripture as “prophecy,” we are never given a concrete equivalent in history which constitutes the fulfillment of the prophecy. The actual experiences of Jesus on earth seem to be theoretical. That is, the writer is deducing their existence from scripture and then labeling scripture as a prophecy of them; his eye rests solely on the latter. The prophecies are given no independent support or illustration, let alone reference to a Gospel.

To make a brief comparison with Justin. In chapter 104 of the *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* Justin quotes lines from Psalm 22, including: “They parted my garments among them and cast lots for my vestments.” He then goes on to say, “And this is recorded to have happened in the memoirs of his Apostles. I have shown that after his crucifixion they who crucified him parted his garments among them.” In other words, Justin has drawn two sides of a clear parallel or equation: Psalm 22 prophesies an event, and here is the event itself, independently presented from a different source. Justin’s source was a written one, which Barnabas may have lacked, but there should have been nothing to prevent Barnabas from offering his own independent source in the form of oral traditions, in a description of the events of history derived independently of scripture. His Christian world should have been full of such things, traditions and ways of speaking about Jesus’ passion and the events of his life which did not rely entirely on the words of scripture, as though scripture were the only concrete source available.

For this author, such a silence is glaring. Elsewhere, Barnabas’ concern is repeatedly to draw a clear parallel between a biblical prototype and a present-day equivalent. He is at pains to show how ancient Hebrew institutions prefigured counterparts in current Christian belief and practice. This is one of the chief aims of his letter, the purpose of his allegorical interpretation of scripture: to show that the scriptural “past” is fulfilled in the Christian “present.” But when he turns to describing Christ’s passion in scripture, the corresponding fulfillment in the experiences of Christ “on earth” go undetailed, unidentified in terms of specific historical content.

Perhaps the most bizarre example of this is the passage immediately preceding the ‘story line’ of the passion in chapter 5.

“For God tells us that the bruising of [the Son’s] flesh is from them [the Jewish people], for he says: ‘When they strike the shepherd, the sheep will be scattered.’”

To show that the Jews are guilty of killing Jesus, he points to a scriptural passage (Zechariah 13:7) in which God is seen to declare this. He does not say, “God prophesied that the Jews would kill his Son and history shows its fulfillment.” Rather, he seems to be implying that the knowledge of ‘history’ itself comes from the scriptural passage. It is God, not historical memory, which has identified the Jews as those who killed his Son.

This view of the history of Barnabas’ Jesus figure is more than implied. It is spelled out by the writer himself. Following the quote in 5:3 of Isaiah 53 (above), he tells his readers:

“Therefore we ought to give great thanks to the Lord that he has given us [i.e., through the scriptures he has just quoted] knowledge of the past, and wisdom for the present, and that we are not without understanding of the future.” (From the Lake translation)

In other words, Barnabas is stating that we know of Christ’s experiences on earth through the scriptures, through passages like Isaiah 53. Near the start of the letter (1:7) he has declared the same principle: “For the Lord made known to us through the prophets things past and things present and has given us the firstfruits of the taste of things to come.” It would seem that there is

no recent history, no oral tradition, in Barnabas' mind which also tells of Christ's experiences. Knowledge of the past comes through scripture and scripture alone. (Staniforth's translation in 5:3 that the writings "give us an insight into the past" looks to be fanciful; I can find no evidence that the verb "*gnôridzô*" is so accommodating.)

A Void on the Gospels

In light of all this, we can look at the passage which seems most 'historical' and help resolve the question of whether Barnabas could have known any written Gospel, or even corresponding oral traditions. 5:7-9 reads in part:

"[By allowing himself to suffer] he was able to fulfill the promise made to our ancestors... and to show...while he was on earth, that he will raise mankind from the dead and judge them. Moreover, by teaching the people of Israel and performing miracles and wonders, he made known his message and his love. But when he chose the apostles who were to preach his gospel, men who were sinners of the worst kind, he showed...that he came not to call saints, but sinners."

The view that Christ had taught and performed miracles (Barnabas never itemizes any of these miracles) conformed to a universal expectation about the Messiah based on scripture. Here, the writer may simply be assuming that such things had happened. Another possibility is that this view of teaching and miracle-working grew out of precedents in the mythical phase of the faith: out of the belief—on the part of men like Paul—that the spiritual Christ communicated with Christian prophets, "teaching" them through the Spirit; out of the fact that miracles had been performed by such prophets in Christ's name. For such things to be attached to a new historical Jesus would have been natural. This is a pointer to the likely derivation of Barnabas' next idea, that Christ had appointed apostles, for in the earlier phase he had done so: an appointment, through spiritual channels, of apostles (like Paul and Peter) who believed they had been called by Christ himself.

(In 8:3 Barnabas declares that these apostles were twelve in number. But he never gives us any names, and he supplies the origin of his own reasoning: because the tribes of Israel were twelve. There is no need to see historical tradition as the source of this information.)

That Barnabas is not in touch with actual history—at least, the history as portrayed in the Gospels—is shown by his description of these "apostles." No one who possessed the later traditions about Peter and Paul would have been likely to call them "sinners of the worst kind." Who, then, does he have in mind? Though he never states it, it is possible that Barnabas had some sense of when the Christian movement started, which means that he may have placed such "apostles"—and consequently Jesus himself—around the time of Peter and Paul. Indeed, he may even have these men in mind, and perhaps the traditions about such early preachers of the Christ were, in Barnabas' circles, less than flattering.

But something else may be operating here as well. In the text, the phrase, "He came not to call saints but sinners" is not set out as a quote; Barnabas does not identify it as coming from any writing, though it does have that flavor. Scholars are quick to focus on it as something taken from Mark 2:17, or the equivalent oral preservation of such a saying by Jesus. It is true that we know of no other location for this saying, but elsewhere Barnabas quotes other things whose source cannot be identified, so this could be from some writing now lost. In any case, those who would claim it to be the saying by Jesus would have to acknowledge that Barnabas' application of it is an anomaly. In the Gospel, Jesus is speaking about the people at large to whom he is appealing in his ministry, "not the righteous, but sinners." He is not referring to the apostles he has called, which is the way Barnabas applies it. It looks as though the expression itself,

wherever he derived it, has influenced Barnabas' picture of the apostles to which he thinks it applies. If Barnabas believes this quotation (if it is that) refers to men like Peter and Paul, then it would indicate to him that those apostles were in fact sinners.

Thus, it is difficult to maintain, as many do, that the line is a quotation from a Gospel, for such a Gospel should have conveyed a different picture of the apostles than the one which Barnabas presents. Even identifying it as an oral tradition of Jesus' words faces objection, for in that case Barnabas would more likely have labeled it Jesus' own saying.

The same problems apply to the claim that another Gospel quotation appears in 4:14. After pointing out that the people of Israel were rejected by God, Barnabas cautions his readers not to be among such people "...of whom it is written that many are called, but few are chosen." This saying appears in the mouth of Jesus in Matthew 22:16, attached to the parable of the wedding guests. Perhaps it comes from a version of the parable unattached to Jesus, set down in writing elsewhere. Or it may have been an established Jewish apocalyptic pronouncement.

But to claim that a Gospel is Barnabas' source for the saying is virtually unsupportable. Again, Barnabas is more likely to have identified it as the words of Jesus, rather than to say simply, "it is written," which is the traditional formula used for holy scripture. At this early date, a primitive Gospel account of Jesus' life would hardly be regarded this way, and there is no evidence for such a reverent attitude toward such accounts until considerably later. Moreover, if this were a Gospel, Barnabas would have before him a wealth of material on Jesus' life. Not only would he then be unlikely to portray the "apostles" the way he does in 5:9, he would possess a detailed historical record to which he could point as the fulfillment of those Old Testament "prophecies" he uses to illustrate Jesus' passion, as Justin does.

Furthermore, he would not show the astonishing ignorance he does on the teachings of Jesus relating to numerous subjects which he discusses throughout the epistle. The question, for example, of whether the Jewish dietary laws are valid is an issue Barnabas expounds on at length (10), without considering any of Jesus' Gospel pronouncements on the subject. What will happen at the End time is a topic of immediate interest to Barnabas, yet nowhere does he introduce any apocalyptic sayings by Jesus, let alone the identification of Jesus as the Son of Man. In a letter whose central concern is "hearing" the word of God that bestows moral direction and correct understanding of the past, present and future, no contribution from Jesus himself is put forward. Barnabas refers to "the new Law of Jesus Christ" (2:6) but never gives us a word of it.

Once again, the point should be made that even if Barnabas had no written record of teachings by Jesus, they should have been present in oral tradition; and even if there were no authentic teachings by Jesus on these issues, at least some of the latter should by now have prompted the invention of such teachings with an attribution to Jesus.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that Barnabas' concept of Jesus as a teacher of Israel in 5:7 is simply a hypothetical one, of fairly recent development and not grounded in actual historical memory. We should note further that the "Two Ways" section appended to the epistle, forming chapters 18-21, is a compendium of Jewish-Christian moral directives, somewhat similar to the opening section of the Didache. In neither document is there any attribution of such teachings to Jesus. It concludes (21:1) with the statement that "All this shows what a good thing it is to have learned the precepts of the Lord [God], as they are set forth in scripture." And in 21:6 the writer (who in these closing chapters may have been a later editor who added this material) advises his readers to "take God for your teacher."

A few other silences in the epistle are worth noting. Barnabas supports (2:4) Isaiah's condemnation of animal sacrifices, but fails to offer the fact that Jesus had made a similar disparagement while pointing to this very passage of Isaiah: "Go and learn what that text means, 'I require mercy, not sacrifice' " (Matthew 9:13). He scoffs at physical circumcision (9) and declares that Abraham's circumcision served only to prefigure the name of Christ and the cross, ignoring any question of Jesus' undergoing of the rite at birth. In discussing the Jews' loss of their Covenant (4:6-8), there is no mention of a new Covenant established by Jesus. He even seeks to discredit the term "son of David" for Christ (12:10-11), appealing to the same argument Jesus himself makes in Matthew 22:43-5, though he shows no sign of being aware of this. As for the Gospel post-resurrection appearances, the writer makes only this brief, cryptic statement (15:9): "We celebrate with gladness the eighth day in which Jesus rose from the dead, and was made manifest, and ascended into heaven." (Lake's quite literal translation.) Not only does this contradict Acts, "was made manifest" (that ubiquitous verb *phaneroô*) hardly seems to do justice to the full range of Gospel traditions about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances.

Scripture Vs. History

Two passages will further illustrate that this writer is not deriving his statements about Jesus "on earth" from his sense of history—or familiarity with a Gospel story—but from scripture. In both cases, Barnabas compares "past" and "present" without ever leaving the pages of the Old Testament. In 7:3, he asks his readers if they know "why he [Christ] was given vinegar and gall to drink at his crucifixion." Is this the historical side of the equation I have earlier said was missing? Barnabas goes on to detail two prefigurings of this 'event,' one in scripture and another of unknown provenance, both relating to priestly practice. He then enlarges on the idea of the drink at the crucifixion which he says those practices 'foretold' (using his characteristically strained exegesis). In these remarks (7:5), there is an allusion to Psalm 69:21—No. 68 in the Septuagint, which is the version of the bible the writer is using. The Septuagint passage reads:

"They gave me also gall [xolê] for my food, and made me drink vinegar [oksos] for my thirst."

In all four Gospels, Jesus on the cross is offered only vinegar [oksos: Mk.15:36, Mt.27:48, Lk.23:36, Jn. 19:29]. Mark, whom all the others are likely copying, probably read the Septuagint passage but took only the vinegar reference as applying to a drink. However, "*xolê*" can also be used of a bitter tasting liquid, and Matthew apparently decided to use the first phrase of the Psalm passage as well, rendering it as a drink. But he does so in a separate incident, having the soldiers offer Jesus a drink of gall mixed with wine (not vinegar) before nailing him to the cross (27:34). In none of the canonical Gospels is Jesus at any point offered a drink which is a *mix* of both vinegar and gall. Only in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (5:16), is the drink offered to Jesus such a mix. (This is another argument against Crossan's view that his "Cross Gospel" stratum of the Gospel of Peter was the first passion story penned, serving as the source for at least the Synoptics, for it is not likely that all three evangelists would reject the mixed-drink feature and substitute a single ingredient.)

Thus, Barnabas' "drink of vinegar and gall at his crucifixion" is more likely to be based on the Septuagint passage than on Gospel or oral tradition. This is rendered virtually certain by the way he enlarges on the 'event' in 7:5. He says that the priestly practices served as a prefiguring of Christ's crucifixion,

"Because 'when I am about to offer My Body for the sins of this new People of Mine, you will be giving Me gall and vinegar to drink. That is why you shall be the only ones to eat, while the people of Israel are fasting and lamenting in sackcloth and ashes.' In this way he indicated his predestined sufferings at their hands."

The inner quotes are Staniforth's, but they serve to make it clear that Barnabas is presenting this as Christ himself speaking and explaining the prophetic meaning of the priests' actions. And the reason for doing this may well have been the nature of the Septuagint passage itself, which speaks in the first person: they gave *me* gall and vinegar. Not only does the same form of expression indicate that this is Barnabas' source, it is a direct confirmation of the principle that early Christian writers up to this time are finding Christ, his words and his activities, in scripture itself and not in historical tradition. Thus, as stated earlier, Barnabas exhibits the peculiar and fallacious paradox of declaring scripture to be a prophecy of the Christ, and then extracting the 'historical' part of the equation from scripture as well.

As the final sentence quoted above puts it, "In this way [that is, 'words' of Christ in based on Psalm 69], he indicated his predestined [in scriptural priestly practice] sufferings at their hands." One doesn't quickly recover from the dizzying effects of that kind of circularity.

Barnabas goes on immediately (7:6) to detail another example of the same fallacious practice. He describes the ritual of the Day of Atonement as recorded in Leviticus 16. The treatment of the two sacrificial goats is declared to be, in its various details, a prefiguring of the experience of Jesus in his passion. How does Barnabas describe that experience (7:9)?

"Now what does that signify? Notice that the first goat is for the altar, and the other is accursed; and that it is the accursed one [which he is comparing to Jesus] that wears the wreath. That is because they shall see him on That Day clad to the ankles in his red woolen robe and will say, 'Is not this he whom we once crucified, and mocked and pierced and spat upon? Yes, this is the man who told us that he was the Son of God.' "

The resemblance of these details to the Gospel scene of the crucifixion is undeniable, of course—because the Gospel picture is derived from scripture—but there are several telltale anomalies. First, Barnabas is not pointing directly to the passion but to a Parousia scene ("That Day") when Christ will arrive at the end of the world; the passion is only looked at in a kind of flashback at that time. And the details (possibly with one exception) are presented in conformity with their scriptural derivation, not in historical or Gospel terms. Thus, the long robe is based on the eschatological scene of a robed Joshua in Zechariah 3:1-5, not on the Gospel detail of Jesus in a mock kingly mantle at his scourging. The question asked in the above quotation is based, not on a Gospel account or historical tradition, but on the words of Zechariah 12:10 ("They shall look upon him whom they have pierced"), with other scriptural references to mocking or rejecting (Isaiah 53) and spitting (Isaiah 50) thrown in.

Once again, Barnabas points to scripture (the ritual of the goat) as a prefiguring of Jesus, but the event that such things prefigure is entirely taken from scripture (Zechariah and Isaiah).

The last phrase, "the man who told us that he was the son of God," is harder to pin down, but since the preceding references are derived from scripture, there is no reason to think that this one is not as well. The writer of this epistle is notorious for his bizarre stretches of interpretation, and perhaps this idea has even been wrung out of the concluding phrase of Zechariah 12:10 which speaks of a "first-born son," something Christians at that time took as referring to the Messiah. It has been pointed out, of course, that the line about the man who said he was the son of God is very similar to Matthew's description (27:43) of the taunts by the crowd at Jesus' crucifixion. This is true, but Barnabas fails to point this out, and any claim that a Gospel or even a corresponding oral tradition was the source of this idea founders on the rest of the passage.

If Barnabas knew a fine detail such as this about the crucifixion scene (one recorded only in Matthew, though Luke says something similar), then he must have had access to a fairly thorough account of the passion. Why then does he show clearly that he knows of no crown of

thorns (Matthew 27:29 and parallels)? He is detailing the ritual handling of the two goats, pointing out that the accursed one—to be driven into the desert—has a wreath of scarlet wool wound about its head. He is at pains to draw a correspondence in Christian faith with every feature of the ritual. He continually speaks of “types” of Jesus—things in scripture that symbolize and prefigure Jesus’ own features.

So what does the red wreath of wool around the goat’s head signify? Barnabas can know nothing of a tradition, or a Gospel account, that Jesus wore a crown of thorns during his passion, for he offers no such parallel. Instead he points to the practice of removing the wool wreath once the goat has reached the desert and placing it on a bramble bush. This, he declares, is to signify that the Christian in reaching for the wool (a symbol of something precious, namely the faith) risks pain and anguish from the bramble thorns on which wool has been placed, a symbol of the suffering and persecution which is the lot of the believer. Even the reference to the “thorns” in the bushes does not prompt the writer to refer to the Gospels’ crown of thorns on Jesus’ head.

We look in vain, then, for anything pointing to history, written or oral, to be found in the Epistle of Barnabas. Scripture may be bursting its seams, but this writer’s picture of an historical Christ is still bounded by the sacred pages of the ancient writings.

A Savior in Flesh

Barnabas’ language, especially the phrase “when he was on earth”—something no epistle writer before him states so explicitly—shows that his idea of Jesus “in flesh” (*en sarki*) has progressed beyond that of his predecessors. He no longer limits Christ’s “incarnation” to the lower spirit layers of heaven and mythological contexts. In 5:10 we are given an insight into the reasoning behind the development of this idea, that the Son had of necessity to enter the material world:

“Furthermore, supposing that he had not come in the flesh, how could it then have been possible for men ever to ‘look upon him and be saved’?” (Inner quotes are by Staniforth.) That last phrase, if meant as a quote, might be from an unknown piece of writing, or it may represent a current philosophical debate. Barnabas is saying that salvation by beholding God is only possible if his Son assumes flesh. Earlier he had declared that Christ’s suffering in human flesh was needed in order to prove that the dead can rise (5:6). The point is, belief that the divine Son came into the world was a product of philosophical necessity and religious need, not an interpretation of an historical figure or event.

We can see in 1 John 4 that this need was not universal. In fact, some in the Johannine circle are *denying* that Jesus “has come in the flesh,” and the writer opposing them labels them “antichrist.” Barnabas’ use of the phrase “come in flesh” (*êlthen en sarki*) is almost identical to the phrase in 1 John 4:3, that Jesus Christ “has come in the flesh” (*en sarki elêluthota*), and is thus a pointer to its meaning in the other epistle, that the Johannine dispute was over whether Christ had incarnated to the earthly world, and not over some docetic question. (Neither epistle makes or addresses any arguments relating to docetism.) Barnabas’ argument, as we shall see, is very similar to that of Ignatius who maintained that Christ had to have come in material flesh, else humanity’s sufferings had no meaning and no assurance of salvation was possible.

Grant makes the observation (*The Apostolic Fathers*, vol.3, p.35) that “Barnabas shows little interest in or awareness of Jesus’ earthly life.” We have come scarcely any way at all from the similar situation in regard to Paul, over half a century earlier. Grant makes another telling observation (*Ibid.*, p.36) that, while “Lord” is used for Jesus in connection with his sufferings, the title is also “freely used for God,” a fact which “makes precise interpretation difficult in

many passages.” That is, it is often unclear just who Barnabas is referring to, and as Grant puts it, “Jesus’ functions often seem to overlap with those of God,” and “Jesus’ acts were God’s acts.” This merging of the two figures is best explained as a continuing vestige of the phase of the faith which Barnabas’ world is just emerging from, the view that Jesus was a spiritual entity only, an aspect of God in heaven. His is a world that is only starting to develop the sense of the Son as a distinct historical personage, though all that can be known of him is still dependent on scripture.

The Sin of the Jews

While Barnabas now postulates a Christ on earth, his starting point remains of the old variety: Jesus Christ is the divine Son in heaven—who then came to earth. He does not start from the historical Jesus of Nazareth and declare him to have been the Son of God. In fact, this is an issue, a question of faith, which nowhere appears in the epistle, despite the writer’s focus on a multitude of debated questions. Even more tellingly, the Jews are never accused of or condemned for not believing that Jesus was the Messiah, which is the way someone like Justin was to put it, as were the Gospels. Rather, the Jews’ “sin” was that they had done the same thing to the Son as they (allegedly) had done to all the prophets sent from God: they had persecuted and slain him (5:11). Nowhere does Barnabas say that this was because they had not believed in his identity and divinity.

This is a subtle but crucial observation. The rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah would have been a piece of information based on historical record, whereas there would be nothing in scripture to point to a feature like this. (And Barnabas does not try to give us such a thing.) Even Paul in Romans 10, scouring the sacred writings for passages foretelling a lack of response on the part of the Jews, fails to offer anything which could fit the idea of rejecting someone who claimed to be God’s Son. Rather, Paul applies his findings only to the rejection of messengers like himself, of apostles who declare the word of God, as the ancient prophets had done. Barnabas, too, casts the Jews’ rejection of Jesus solely as the killing of the messenger, though he goes a step further in equating that messenger with the Son himself. The point is, such a rejection is something which need not be dependent on historical record but rather would be derived from scripture.

In fact, this is precisely what Barnabas tells us. Throughout chapters 5 and 6 he quotes Old Testament passages which he interprets as pointing to the Jews’ killing and rejection of the Son. But there is a critical difference between Barnabas’ picture of the Jews’ rejection and killing of Jesus, and that of the Gospels. For Barnabas is lacking the central feature of the Gospel Jews, the essential failing they were accused of by generations of subsequent Christians: that they had closed their minds to his true identity, to his fulfillment of the prophecies; they had rejected his claims to be the Son of God and Messiah. In fact, Barnabas seems to do the opposite. He wraps up (6:7) with a quotation from the Wisdom of Solomon:

“And the prophet says of the Jews, ‘Woe to their souls, they have planned a wicked scheme to their own hurt, saying, Let us bind the Just One in fetters, for he is a vexation to us.’ ” (2:12) In other words, Barnabas assumes from this passage that the Jews knew Jesus was the Son of God but killed him because they did not like his message. He tells his readers (5:11) that all this had been intended by God in order to consummate the Jews’ long and sinful history of rejection and to sweep the stage for the new inheritors of his promise.

If behind Barnabas had lain a near-century of condemnation of the Jews on the grounds that they had rejected the man Jesus of Nazareth as being the Messiah and Son of God (the picture created by the Gospels and held to this day), he is hardly likely to have presented things in his own peculiar way.

A Missing Link

“Barnabas” is typical of a certain class of early Christian writer. He is not an intellectual giant and not particularly inspiring, and some of his pieces of interpretation strike us today as ridiculous and embarrassing. Still, he is a knowledgeable student of the scriptures, which makes his lack of a written Gospel and his equally empty stock of oral tradition about Jesus something which cannot simply be ignored, especially as he was probably writing in a major center like Alexandria, in the early decades of the second century or perhaps late in the first.

Though he still draws his script from God’s coded word in the ancient books, Barnabas has moved the scene of Christ’s salvation activities onto the stage of history. As such, he is a “missing link” in the evolution of Jesus of Nazareth. The impulse to place the spiritual Christ in a material past resulted from a combination of psychological need and a study of scripture. As the sacred writings were plumbed ever deeper for more information about the Christ who had entered flesh, the words themselves would have created an increasingly immediate and vivid picture. After all, the writings of the prophets were not about the spiritual realm; most of them were too early to possess a concept of the later Platonic-style creations. The ancient writers had spoken of material events and people, in the context of their own times. What later ages were to make of their words would have flabbergasted them. But their down-to-earth language eventually reasserted itself and pulled the spiritual Christ in that very direction, onto the land of Israel and into the time of the early empire. It told interpreters like Barnabas that he had actually taught and performed miracles, that he had chosen followers, that the Jewish leaders had conspired against him and killed him. It had probably told other preachers whose names are now lost many other things about him which were imparted to their audiences and slowly entered Christian consciousness.

In Part Three of the Main Articles (“The Evolution of Jesus of Nazareth”), I suggested that the impulse to the historicization of the spiritual Christ was not confined to the Gospels, that such an impulse may also have been developing independently of them. Since Barnabas shows none of the biographical detail we see in Ignatius, which can reasonably be put down to the spread of basic Gospel ideas in the northern Levant region two or three decades after Mark was written, it may make better sense to see the trend in Barnabas’ community as something that was not, thus far, impelled directly by Mark or the later evangelists.

Could Mark have been influenced in part by the beginnings of a wider trend toward historicization? Or were they two parallel developments which only began interacting with each other after both were under way? While the internal evidence within Mark itself would indicate that his tale was an allegory employing midrash on scripture, I have said that to the extent that he was part of a Q-type milieu, Mark could have imagined the existence of a founding figure such as evolved in the later Q document, and his Gospel may have been designed as a fictional expansion on such a figure, perhaps for instructive purposes and symbolic of much that was going on in his own community. How much the later evangelists believed that Mark’s story was based on history is not possible to say. If, at the same time, Mark had come in contact with circles of the Christ cult who were beginning to think historically about their Son of God, such as we see in the Epistle of Barnabas (even if this particular document was likely written later than Mark), this may have influenced the first evangelist’s ‘biographical’ creation.

Of course, this is essentially speculation. But deductive speculation is what one has recourse to after all the evidence has been examined, and one seeks to formulate a scenario which best explains the features of that evidence. It is a legitimate exercise, even if certain elements of the scenario have no specific illustration in the documents themselves. This goes on all the time in historical research, and especially in New Testament research. For the first hundred years after

the time of the reputed life of Jesus, we have a miniscule number of documents compared to the amount that must have been written by these various apocalyptic sects, religious cults and reform movements, Jewish and Hellenistic, operating across the empire. The few we have are like narrow windows onto an obscure landscape, and none of them are concerned with presenting scientific, unbiased, or historically accurate pictures of the world around them. For too long we have allowed our own picture of the period to be determined by the faith traditions and interpretations of the Christian Church, and that includes the bulk of the scholars who for centuries have been engaged in biblical research. It is time to offer new scenarios, new paradigms, to attempt to achieve a better understanding of how Christianity began and unfolded, now that the old paradigms have crumbled with the arrival, in critical New Testament study, of more rational standards by which to judge the documentary evidence.

— IV —

The Letters of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch

Of the fifteen ancient letters that bear Ignatius' name, eight have long been rejected as spurious, including ones addressed to the Virgin Mary and the apostle John, as well as the cities of Antioch, Philippi and Tarsus. The remaining seven, to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrneans, and to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, exist in shorter and longer forms ("Recensions"), with the shorter almost universally judged for the past two centuries to be the genuine version. The longer Recensions have been heavily interpolated with Gospel references and other polemical and devotional material.

Traditional dating of these letters, along with many biographical elements about Ignatius himself, is dependent on the document known as The Martyrdom of Ignatius. Its reliability remains in question, as do most 'biographical' accounts of early Christian figures set down at later times. Accepting a certain degree of reliability leads to dates of either 107 or 116 CE as the year of Ignatius' death in the arena at Rome, with the added, perhaps fanciful, detail that the sentence was imposed at Antioch by the emperor Trajan himself on his way to a campaign in the east.

Whether all the circumstances of Ignatius' condemnation and martyrdom are historical or not, the question of the authenticity of the letters themselves is a separate issue. Traditional scholarship by and large accepts them; radical scholarship since the late 19th century has tended to date them later, perhaps as late as 160. Again, it is not crucial for the purposes of this article to arrive at a firm decision as to authenticity. My own inclination would be to lean away from authenticity but to date them no more than a decade or two after Ignatius' passing. The main reason for finding a date after the middle of the century unconvincing is the absence in the shorter recension of all but the most basic Gospel data along with elements like apostolic tradition and succession, and the conclusion that the writer was familiar with no written Gospels. These features will be discussed at length below.

The reasons arguing against authenticity of authorship are the alleged circumstances of the letters themselves. It is difficult to believe that under the situation of arrest and transport by military guard, Ignatius would have had the freedom to receive delegations from several Christian churches along the way. At Smyrna he was also visited by clerical representatives from three other cities of western Asia Minor, and one wonders at the logistical difficulty which would have been attendant on coordinating such a visit. One also wonders at the willingness of all these bishops and church people to place themselves in danger of being arrested and charged with similar offences. That Ignatius would have the opportunity and materials to write at such length to so many, and find ways to dispatch all these letters, also raises doubt. Finally, the letters themselves are suspiciously well crafted, and go on often repetitively and unnecessarily

long to make their points, more like little treatises than pieces written under difficulty and duress. None of these objections is decisive, but they are enough to give one pause in accepting the letters at face value. Perhaps a later author designed them as a tribute to the martyred bishop and as vehicles for the issues they address, but we have no way of knowing how genuine is the scenario in which the letters are cast, and it may be that the Martyrdom has been based on the circumstances portrayed in the letters.

Does Ignatius know any of the Gospels?

Apart from Ignatius' fixation on martyrdom, which often approaches the unsavory, there are two issues which he repeatedly addresses, and we can assume that if the letters are not authentic, these constituted the 'agenda' of the later writer—as indeed they would have been of Ignatius himself. One is the authority of the clergy in Christian communities. Obey your bishops and presbyters is a constant exhortation. The picture of clerical government seems a little further advanced here than in 1 Clement, for there is a greater implication of hierarchy, a pyramid with the bishop at the head (e.g., Trallians 3:1, Magnesians 13:2). One thing still missing, however, is any sense of a centralized authority, even an advocated one, across the wider Christian world. The Inscription of the epistle to the Romans designates that church as "holding chief place in the territories in the district of Rome," but whether this implies an authority over the others cannot be said, and Ignatius never urges deference to any outside church upon the congregations he writes to.

Perhaps the chief reason Ignatius is concerned with obedience to ecclesiastical authority concerns the other, more important issue he addresses in all the letters but Romans. He is concerned with unity, for there seems to be a widespread contention, a troubling heresy or heresies, in the Asia Minor communities, from Antioch itself to Smyrna and Ephesus on the Aegean. The exact nature of this heresy, or whether Ignatius is attacking two separate and distinct groups—usually styled Judaizers and docetists—is still unsettled. I will offer my own view of the situation, but first the question of whether Ignatius knew any written Gospel needs to be addressed.

Two general observations. At no time does Ignatius point directly to a written Gospel in support of his claims about Jesus against his opponents. His occasional reference to "the gospel" is always singular, with no name of a reputed author attached to it, nor any sense that there are more than one of these entities, requiring differentiation. As in the case of the other Apostolic Fathers, scholars tend to judge that Ignatius draws on no written Gospel but only on oral tradition. (See William R. Schoedel: *Ignatius of Antioch*, p.108, 115. Schoedel judges that all the uses of the term "sound much more like references to a message than to a document.") Thus the term "gospel" denotes, as in Paul, the preached kerygma. And if this is the case, it implies that Ignatius cannot be familiar with a written "Gospel," else he would have to make a distinction between the two categories. In Philadelphians 5, he refers to the gospel message he "clings to" and in the next sentence says that the Prophets also preached this "gospel." The latter cannot be referring to any product of the evangelists.

This is not to say that some have not suggested a knowledge on Ignatius' part of Matthew or John (rarely Luke and never Mark). It is true that expressions in the epistles often have a particular affinity to passages in Matthew. The problem is—as in 1 Clement—knowledge of a Gospel implies that a whole range of material, supplying arguments and precedents, should have been available to the writer in regard to issues that are clearly important to him, and there would have been no feasible reason for him not to appeal to it. In defense of his claims for the veracity of such historical details as Jesus' birth from Mary, his baptism by John, his crucifixion by Pilate, it is difficult to believe that Ignatius would not have pointed directly to a written

document that contained an account of such things. Many episodes in the Gospel story could have demonstrated the ‘humanity’ of Jesus. If Ignatius wants his readers “to be convinced” of this or that aspect of his human Christ, he should have been quoting Matthew on these occasions, and clearly identifying his source at least some of the time.

Some of the glaring silences include the idea of apostolic succession. Unlike 1 Clement, which contains a primitive form of the idea, in that the first apostles appointed leaders to govern each new community and thus the appointed elders in Corinth derive their authority from such a precedent, Ignatius expresses no such concept. As Schoedel puts it (*Ibid.*, p.201), “There is no apostolic succession in Ignatius,” and appointment of authorities is only “in terms of a divine power which continually realizes itself in the institutions of the church.” Had Ignatius a Gospel like Matthew, he would surely have found precedents in Jesus’ own appointment of apostles and the powers with which he invested them. Indeed, the practice of Christian communities should have been universally based on such traditions—and by extension, on the chain of succeeding appointments going back to the first apostles.

There is very little if anything in Ignatius about apocalyptic expectation. Ephesians 11:1 has a bare reference to these being “the last times.” But nowhere does Ignatius intimate that Jesus will be returning as those last times come to an end, something that is a major focus of Matthew, with his Parousia of Jesus as the Son of Man. Could Ignatius’ community possess a Gospel like Matthew and ignore its—and Jesus’—eschatological predictions? (The first element of the declaration that Jesus is “son of man and Son of God, in Ephesians 20:2, is simply referring to his dual nature.) Ignatius even uses the word Parousia to signify the Incarnation itself (Phil. 9:2), the birth of Jesus into the world, not his promised return to judge it, which is the centerpiece of Matthew’s apocalyptic picture. Schoedel calls this a “shift” of the Parousia terminology to a “first coming”—a shift of usage which, tellingly, no earlier documents display. But it is more likely that Ignatius has no tradition of a Parousia of Christ, just as other circles apparently lacked it (such as those of 1 Clement and 1 John).

The other curiosity about Ignatius’ references to “the gospel” is that his description of its content (written or orally preached) is entirely limited to the birth, baptism, passion and resurrection. Nothing in Ignatius’ catalogue speaks to the ministry in Galilee, to miracle-working, to any prophecy by Jesus. No word or deed of Jesus on earth is ever appealed to, beyond the fact of his dying and rising, and his birth is simply stated. This, and two passages which scholars like to relate to Gospel incidents, will be looked at later.

No less dubious is the assumed presence of oral tradition in Ignatius’ thinking, and by extension in his community. He never appeals to the idea that certain things have been passed along from earlier generations of apostles, that sayings or traditions go back to Jesus himself. While he several times refers to Jesus in a teaching role (e.g., Ephesians 9:2: “the commandments of Jesus Christ” or Magnesians 9:1: “Jesus Christ our sole teacher”), no actual saying is ever identified.

Not even on the subject so dear to Ignatius’ heart, martyrdom, is a saying of Jesus put forward. In Romans 6:1 he says: “The ends of the earth and the kingdoms of this world shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth.” In such a fervent declaration, one might have expected him to appeal to the saying in Matthew 16:26, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul,” or the dramatic Temptation scene in which the devil offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world. R. M. Grant (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p.91) confidently declares that Ignatius’ words are based on Gospel sayings about self-denial, and commentators as a rule always seem secure in their knowledge of what is present in the writer’s mind, but no such mental connection is ever evident

in the text itself. In Ephesians 14, in recommending a certain moral outlook to his readers, Ignatius appeals to the same thought which Jesus expresses in Matthew 12:33, that “a tree is known by its fruits.” The instinct of the preacher ought to have led to a mention of this parallel, the impetus provided by Jesus’ own words, which is a phenomenon we see expressed in preachers of all ages since.

In fact, the impression is consistently conveyed that in these ‘echoes’ of the Gospel, Ignatius has no awareness that he is quoting Jesus. In his letter to Polycarp, he admonishes the bishop of Smyrna to “in all circumstances be wise as the serpent though always harmless as the dove.” In this sort of context, the urging of some attitude or behavior, the most natural thing would have been to say something like, “as Jesus told us.” These very words are found in Matthew 10:16. (So close are they to the Gospel saying that Staniforth puts them in italics as though signifying a quote.) Ignatius makes no such attribution. In fact, an example like this suggests the likely source of many of the Gospel-like sayings Ignatius uses, namely commonplace maxims, culled from the expression of the time, both Jewish and Hellenistic, some of them age-old, some reflecting contemporary innovative thinking. Scholars who discount knowledge of a written Gospel on Ignatius’ part suggest that both he and Matthew are drawing on oral traditions, creating a commonality of wording and sentiment. But the fact that no attribution to Jesus is ever offered by Ignatius suggests rather (as does an epistle like James) that these ideas were simply in the air of the time and were only placed in Jesus’ mouth by the evangelists, some of them earlier in Q.

Claims are also made that Ignatius may know the Gospel of John, pointing especially to Philadelphians 7:1. Here the writer speaks of the Spirit, which “knows whence it comes and whither it goes, and tests secret things.” The first part of the quote is almost identical to part of John 3:8, also speaking of the Spirit. But the phrase has the ring of an established saying about the Spirit which could have been known to many. A similar idea is expressed in 1 Corinthians 2:10, though not with common wording. The point is, in the absence of any clear identification with a Gospel on the part of a writer, the possibility that both are drawing on common stores of expression from the background culture of the time is by far the more sensible interpretation.

To mention a related silence, Ignatius is also fixated in Christ’s own sufferings and their “true” nature, yet he never once offers any details of those sufferings such as are recounted so vividly in the Gospels. That traditions about gory details of the crucifixion, authentic or not, would not have been circulating at least orally, is difficult if not impossible to believe, and yet Ignatius is silent on the whole subject—as is Paul.

Rising in Flesh

Here we can look at one of the Gospel-like anecdotes the letters contain. In Smyrneans 3 we read the following (in the Lake translation):

“For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the Resurrection. And when he came to those with Peter he said to them: ‘Take, handle me and see that I am not a phantom without a body.’ And they immediately touched him and believed, being mingled both with his flesh and spirit.”

If there is any place in the Ignatian letters where we would expect the writer to appeal to all the resources at his command, oral and written, this is it. Is he quoting a Gospel here, however loosely? Here is the passage in Luke which bears some resemblance to Ignatius:

“And he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ ” (24:38-40 RSV)

Grant (*op.cit.*, p.115) suggests that Ignatius is not likely to be quoting Luke so freely and that he is relying on oral tradition. One phrase, “*psêlaphêstate me kai idete*,” “handle me and see,” is identical between the two, but the thought is so basic it is difficult to conclude that one borrows from the other. Schoedel (*op.cit.*, p.225) also suggests that he is not loosely quoting Luke, if only because “further evidence for dependence on Luke is virtually absent in Ignatius.” One might add that if Ignatius was consciously presenting a passage from a written document (even if he didn’t have it before him), he would have said so, for pointing to such a document would have been a natural impulse as a way of giving his declaration authority and support.

The same argument applies in regard to the “doubting Thomas” episode in John. Those who suggest that Ignatius knows the Fourth Gospel need to acknowledge that such a claim founders on this passage, for Ignatius would surely have referred to the Thomas incident to make his point much more vividly, and again, he would have spotlighted his source. But we can go further. The “doubting Thomas” episode can hardly have been circulating in oral tradition, for Ignatius’ silence on it is a clear indicator that he knows of no such incident.

The Gospel of Matthew has no equivalent scene where Jesus directs his followers to touch him (Matthew’s post-resurrection scenes are more primitive and less detailed, being only the first rung on the evangelists’ ladder of invention following Mark’s bare empty tomb ending), although he has the women take hold of Jesus’ feet when they meet him on the road. But if Ignatius knew Matthew, one might expect he would appeal at least in a general way to the post-resurrection scenes in that Gospel to bolster his contention of Jesus’ true resurrection.

How, then, do we interpret the anecdote in Smyrneans 3? All commentators make the assumption that there has to be a source—however garbled in the transmission—going back to Easter or the early apostolic preaching. But this is unfounded, especially in the absence of any indication that Ignatius ever appeals to traditions, oral or written, going back before his own time. (I’ll enlarge on that when considering Ignatius’ faith declarations against his opponents.) How do such sayings or anecdotes materialize? The simplest explanation is that they are invented: by preachers and writers, by figures like Ignatius, seeking to illustrate a newly developed belief about Jesus. Paul himself offers more than one directive, incident or prophetic scene which he states or implies has come to him ‘from the Lord,’ by perceived revelation. When a preacher is in front of an audience (or readers), making some theological declaration, describing some act or experience of Jesus, if something comes into his mind which would effectively add to his exposition, he is not likely to pass it up. Later he may regard it as a revelation. He may be expanding on an earlier statement or scenario known in the community, equally invented. (Who has not seen modern evangelists employ similar techniques, even making claims that God or Jesus had spoken to them personally?) We must keep in mind that the early Christian preaching movement was based on the idea of revelation from the Lord, both in the study of scripture and in Christian meetings where prophets prophesied and others interpreted glossolalia (see 1 Corinthians 12 and 14). Once the principle is established that the Lord communicates information about himself, about commandments, about the ‘gospel,’ then anything appearing in any piece of writing can conceivably be imputed to such an origin, if there is no clear declaration or evidence to the contrary.

Besides, if the evangelists can simply make things up, why not Ignatius? Critical scholars often judge that Gospel figures like Judas, incidents like Gethsemane, or many of the post-resurrection scenes, are likely the evangelists’ invention. Luke, in order to demonstrate the reliability of the physical resurrection, invented a ‘reliable’ scene in which the apostles touch the physical Jesus. The fact that no other writing before the Gospel of John arrives ever mentions the dramatic “doubting Thomas” episode—something that should have been a prime candidate for

preservation and transmission by oral tradition—can only lead us to conclude that the fourth evangelist simply made it up.

Besides, what does Ignatius' anecdote actually say? It's pretty basic. Speaking to Peter and the disciples, Jesus said, touch me and see that I am not a phantom without a body. Ignatius is having to deal with heretics who declare that Jesus was a phantom without a true physical body. Ignatius' counter to this in the Smyrneans passage is little more than the basic denial, No he was not. There is no necessity to see it as derived from some circulating tradition. Ignatius "knows and believes" that Jesus was in flesh after his resurrection. The anecdote is his way of stating such a principle, something he does not attribute to any source, oral or written, lying outside or prior to himself.

When he goes on to say that "after his resurrection he ate and drank with them as being in flesh," this, too, need not be tied to tradition but could well be a statement based on the assumption that if Jesus had been resurrected in the flesh and spent time with the apostles, he would likely have shared meals with them, if only because it would have been an obvious way to prove himself.

If it is a virtual certainty that Ignatius had no written Gospel, and never identifies oral or apostolic traditions about Jesus' ministry and passion circulating in that part of the empire, we face an astonishing situation. The bishop of Antioch, living in the foremost Christian center in the eastern Mediterranean, almost on the outskirts of Galilee and Judea, seemingly has no access to knowledge about Jesus' life and death beyond the basic biographical data he puts forward. He does not identify a single saying or moral dictum attributed to Jesus; he seems to know nothing about miracles; he mentions two incidents which bear an uncertain and superficial resemblance to Gospel events. He never alludes to features of early Christian history surrounding the apostles, save the bare names of Peter and Paul (Romans 4:3)—not even making a reference to their martyrdom, a key issue for Ignatius. This silence, as in 1 Clement 5, would tend to show that at this time the legends about such a fate concerning the two apostles had not yet developed. Of earlier documents, Ignatius shows a familiarity with 1 Corinthians and possibly one or two other Pauline epistles and Hebrews. Almost a century after the reputed crucifixion, perhaps a full hundred years if the letters are somewhat later creations, this is the state of knowledge about the seminal figure and events of the Christian movement. It certainly casts serious doubt on the almost universal consensus (based on no concrete evidence) that Mark had been written by 70, and the rest of the Gospels—and Acts—by the year 100. Rather, the picture created by Ignatius fits consistently with the slow-developing, fragmented condition we see in earliest Christianity, the limited contacts between communities, the lack of doctrinal agreement among them, the puzzling anomalies, the perplexing variety of ideas, and the vast silence on the Gospel story, which the murky first hundred years presents.

The Nature of the Heresy in Ignatius

In railing against those who disagree with his own position, Ignatius throughout five of the seven letters makes a handful of basic biographical statements about his historical Jesus. The principal ones are these (in the Staniforth translation):

Ephesians 18:2

"Under the divine dispensation, Jesus Christ our God was conceived by Mary of the seed of David and of the Spirit of God; he was born, and he submitted to baptism so that by his passion he might sanctify water."

Magnesians 11

“I want you to be unshakably convinced of the birth, passion, and the resurrection which were the true and indisputable experiences of Jesus Christ, our hope, in the days of Pontius Pilate’s governorship.”

Trallians 9:1

“Close your ears, then, if anyone preaches to you without speaking of Jesus Christ. Christ was of David’s line. He was the son of Mary; he was verily [*alêthôs*] and indeed born, and ate and drank; he was verily persecuted in the days of Pontius Pilate, and verily and indeed crucified, and gave up the ghost in the sight of all heaven and earth and the powers of the nether world.”

Smyrneans 1:1-2

“You hold the firmest convictions about our Lord; believing him to be truly of David’s line in his manhood, yet Son of God by the divine will and power; truly born of a virgin; baptized by John for his fulfilling of all righteousness; and in the days of Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch truly pierced by nails in his human flesh...”

In a few other places, Ignatius makes statements that more clearly refer to docetism and his rejection of it as unacceptable:

Trallians 10

“It is asserted by some who deny God—in other words, who have no faith—that his sufferings were not genuine...In that case, I am giving away my life for nothing, and all the things I have ever said about the Lord are untruths.”

Smyrneans 2-3

“And suffer he did, verily and indeed; just as he did verily and indeed raise himself again. His passion was no unreal illusion, as some skeptics aver...” This is followed by his declaration that “I know and believe that he was in actual human flesh, even after his resurrection,” and the anecdote discussed above about appearing to his disciples, who touch him and verify his physicality.

Smyrneans 4:2

“After all, if everything our Lord did was only illusion, then these chains of mine must be illusory too.”

Smyrneans 5:2

“So what is the point of my standing well in the opinion of a man who blasphemes my Lord by denying that he ever bore a real human body?”

There is no question that in this latter group of passages, Ignatius is combating a position known as docetism. But a clarification is required here. It is recognized that the earliest form of this kind of outlook was significantly different from the one Ignatius witnesses to. Associated with Cerinthus (about whom knowledge is scanty) around the beginning of the second century, this doctrine claimed that Jesus was a mere man, into whom the spirit of the divine Christ entered only at the former’s baptism, to depart from that man before the crucifixion. Consequently, the passion was not undergone by Christ himself. (A corollary, we must assume, is that for such as Cerinthus, the suffering and death of Jesus was not the source of salvation, and that there was no real resurrection.) This, strictly speaking, is not docetism. Rather, the true docetic doctrine, of which we have no other evidence before we get further into the second century, stated that Christ was born, lived his life, suffered, died and resurrected only in the artificial *semblance* of a material body (*dokein*=to seem), but that he was really spirit all the time, a “phantom.” This avoided the distasteful (to some) idea that a divine being, especially one who was part of God, would have entered flesh and suffered from its pain and frailties. The latter, however, was an absolute necessity to minds like Ignatius. If all that Christ suffered was an illusion, not genuine, then “I am giving away my life for nothing” (Tral. 10) and “our resurrection is jeopardized” (Sm. 5:3).

One point to note in passing is that if we have reason to doubt that at the time of Ignatius' death as tradition sees it, the later form of docetism had fully materialized, the picture of Ignatius' opponents in the letters becomes suspect, leading us to give greater credence to dating them perhaps a decade or two later.

Before examining the first group of passages, a further question needs to be addressed. Scholars are still divided as to how to interpret the opponents in Ignatius' letters. Do they represent one 'heresy' or two? Is there a distinction between those who are advocating a docetic view of Jesus and those who advocate an adherence to Judaism, or are they essentially the same people who combine both positions? Beyond that, I would ask, is there an element which denies the historicity of any Jesus in the recent past, docetic or not, Judaizing or not?

The docetists are addressed in the second group of passages listed above. The Judaizing faction is represented in a few passages like Magnesians 8-10:

"Never allow yourselves to be led astray by the teachings and the time-worn fables of another people...If we are still living in the practice of Judaism, it is an admission that we have failed to receive the gift of grace...so lay aside the old good-for-nothing leaven, now grown stale and sour, and change to the new, which is Jesus Christ...To profess Jesus Christ while continuing to follow Jewish customs is an absurdity."

As Staniforth points out, most scholars tend to assume two different groups of opponents, although a few like Lightfoot and Bauer postulated a single 'Judaean-Docetic' heresy. (None, of course, recognize a full-blown denial of the very historicity of Jesus.) But Ignatius never makes it clear that he is speaking of distinct groups of opponents. While he talks of "some" here and "some" there, they all seem to blur together, only with different emphases voiced in different places. Let's start by looking at those passages in the first group quoted above, which seem to be focusing on the veracity of basic historical elements.

In the Days of Pontius Pilate

When Ignatius declares in Magnesians 11 that he wants his readers to be convinced of the birth, passion and resurrection which took place at the time of Pontius Pilate, and that these things "were truly and certainly done by Jesus Christ" (Lake), or when in Trallians 9 he declares that Christ was truly born of Mary in the family of David, truly persecuted by Pilate and truly crucified in the sight of all, the language goes beyond a counter to docetism, if indeed it addresses it at all. As Schoedel says in regard to Magnesians (*op.cit.*, p.125), this is "relatively anemic as an anti-docetic statement." Ignatius conveys nothing so much as a declaration that these events had actually happened, that they are historically true, implying that others were denying such a historicity. If, for example, he only meant that when Christ was born of Mary it was in an actual physical body, not a phantom one, we might have expected him to be thus specific. In the several passages where he is stating historical facts like this, he never gives us that specific docetic orientation or language.

The word *dokein* is used only in passages that clearly address docetism, such as Trallians 10 and Smyrneans 4:2. Schoedel claims that using the phrase "ate and drank" in Trallians 9 betrays an interest in docetism. Possibly, but it could also be a handy phrase representing the idea that Jesus had 'lived'—coming between being born and being persecuted by Pilate. It meant he did the normal things real men do.

While maintaining that Ignatius' historical arguments are "designed to answer docetism" (*Ibid.*, p.153), Schoedel nevertheless admits (p.124) that a passage like Magnesians 9 "also suggests that Ignatius had in mind a denial of the passion more thoroughgoing than our argument

has so far indicated. What ‘some deny’ in Sm. 5.1 is the very reality of Christ’s death.” Schoedel pulls back from this abyss by going on to judge that the Ignatian comment in Magnesians 9:1—“though some deny him”—is an “exaggeration” (*Ibid.*, p.125, n.9), a kind of throwaway link made between the Judaizers he is criticizing and the docetists.

Schoedel, as do others, calls attention to the frequent use of the word “*alêthôs*” (truly) as an anti-docetic indicator in Trallians 9 and Smyrneans 1. But this adverb can also entail the meaning of “in actuality,” in reference to historical veracity or any other perceived truth. Its use here is ambiguous, and it is used both in reference to the “true” sufferings of Jesus and his “true” birth from Mary and crucifixion by Pilate. (In Romans 8:2 it is used in a general sense, when Ignatius claims that he is “speaking truly.”)

Does the presence of genuinely anti-docetic statements, such as the second group listed above, force us to regard all of Ignatius’ arguments as having solely a docetic context (as unspecific as they might be), and that he cannot be arguing for a purely historical factuality as well? Let’s consider a couple of other passages.

The passage in Magnesians (8-10) quoted above deals undeniably with “Judaizers,” either converted Jews who want to retain some of their heritage, or gentiles who are urging that Jewish customs be adopted or maintained. “If we are still living in the practice of Judaism,” we are without grace, says Ignatius. Drop the “old leaven” for the “new.” “It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism” (Lake). And yet in the midst of these admonitions, Ignatius says this:

“That death [of Jesus], though some deny it, is the very mystery which has moved us to become believers, and endure tribulation to prove ourselves pupils of Jesus Christ, our sole teacher. In view of this, *how can it be possible for us to give him no place in our lives...*” (my emphasis; literally, “how shall we be able to live without him”)

Apparently these Judaizers hold viewpoints which go beyond the simple advocacy of Jewish traditions. But is it docetism or something more? If they simply hold a docetic doctrine, would this have to mean that they are denying the death of Jesus, or that they are entirely doing without him, as Ignatius charges? Staniforth’s explanation (Mag., notes 4 and 5), that these people are indeed docetists and this is simply a denial of “the reality of the Passion,” and that living without him or giving him no place in our lives is “by the docetic rejection of his death and resurrection,” seems strained, an attempt to force the writer’s words into a preconceived mold. It is not impossible that Ignatius sees things this way, but there is no denying that the language he uses is much more sweeping.

It is similarly more sweeping in the Trallians 9 passage: “Close your ears, then, if anyone preaches to you without speaking of Jesus Christ.” In Philadelphians 6, Ignatius condemns those who “fail to preach Jesus Christ,” the latter also in the context of those who advocate Judaism. As in Magnesians 9, no docetic language is in view here; rather, the thought seems to be that there are Christians who go about failing to preach the Jesus that Ignatius believes in, and which he defines in historical terms, not in anti-docetic ones. Because the language *could* be ambiguous, with docetic implications read into it, the issue cannot be definitively resolved, but we are still faced with the implications which the texts themselves more openly convey: that this is a denial of the historical fact of birth by Mary, baptism by John, and crucifixion by Pilate. Can we formulate a picture of the conditions at the time of Ignatius which would see the various positions given to Ignatius’ opponents as part of a conglomerate yet coherent situation?

A Cauldron of Ideas

Here we need to step back and consider the broader picture. If everyone Ignatius is opposing is simply a docetist, including those who also advocate Judaism, we have to ask how such a position arose. Everything that Ignatius says indicates that these opponents lived and operated *within* the wider Christian community. Like the opponents in 1 and 2 John, they are being received and listened to by Christians, which is why Ignatius adjures them not to do so (Eph. 7:1, Phil. 6:1). In the orthodox scenario, this would mean that the movement toward denying the physical reality of everything Christ underwent, probably denying the role of the resurrection itself since such a thing was only that of a phantom, would have to have been a staggering about-face in regard to the central kerygma of the faith, a complete rejection of some 80 years or more of belief presumably held by Christians of all stripes in all places. Why would there be a widespread enough acceptance of such new preaching—or at least a willingness to consider it—that Ignatius must regard it as of the greatest danger to contemporary communities and preach so virulently against it? How could we understand such a development? If based on philosophical considerations (which the docetic stance was), why did it develop only in Ignatius' time; why not earlier in the time of Paul?

Moreover, docetism as generally envisioned is essentially a negative movement. If we follow the usual interpretation of commentators like Schoedel, a great number of Christian preachers have coalesced all across Asia Minor (at least) to preach a doctrine of denial, that Jesus Christ was *not* real, that he had not undergone suffering, death and resurrection in true bodily form. Could this idea have motivated so great a number of Christian believers to become apostles and propagate such denials? Missionaries are rather driven by *positive* convictions, by new ideas they perceive as advantageous. Ignatius' opponents would be in the unenviable position of approaching people who had long believed in their faith and telling them that they were mistaken, deceived and defrauded by three-quarters of a century of teaching. At the same time, they would be trying to substitute a much less appealing view, almost an insulting one, of the Jesus of Nazareth Christians had hitherto embraced. How did such preachers get past the first encounter at the prospect's doorway, much less avoid having a chamber pot thrown at their heads?

This standard view of docetism makes little sense. We need to look for a new alignment of the movement within early Christianity. It seems natural to regard it as part and parcel of the growing gnostic phenomenon, that the world and matter was evil, that separation from it and a return to one's divine nature in unity with God in heaven was the goal of salvation, and that if a Savior figure had entered the material world to impart the knowledge of those truths, he had not done so in material form. Current scholarship on the wider spectrum of the gnostic movement has concluded that it began and existed independently of Christianity, though links were eventually made by some gnostic sects to the Christian Jesus; and that it had its own range of Savior figures that were independent of Jesus and were mythological in nature (such as the Third Illuminator in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, or Derdekeas in *The Paraphrase of Shem*).

It looks as though some of these ideas had developed within the circle of Christian communities of which Ignatius was a part. A passage like Smyrneans 5 strongly suggests that this 'heresy' had arisen *inside* the community. But instead of regarding it as coming up against a long-established way of viewing Jesus, rooted firmly in an historical base and traditions no one prior to this time had questioned, we need to see the two tendencies as competing on a level playing field. They emerged more or less at the same time. (Here we can appeal to Walter Bauer's seminal *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* for its picture of a widespread Christian landscape during the first and second centuries—including in Ignatius' Syria—which was as much 'heretical' as 'orthodox.') In other words, Ignatius' historical Jesus who had been

born of Mary and crucified by Pilate was no more entrenched than the docetic/gnostic one. The apostles of the latter movement were going about “not speaking of Jesus Christ” the recent human man, they were gaining a hearing and undoubtedly some converts, because the historical Jesus was an equally newly-developed idea, advocated by such as Ignatius in language aimed at establishing, first and foremost, his historical veracity. The docetists were not bucking a tradition of decades, or butting their heads against longstanding views of Jesus the man and an historical, physical resurrection.

The clash of these two outlooks produced two effects, two central arguments. One was centered on the docetic question. As long as Christians, like Paul, had propagated a divine Christ in heaven, one who had not yet set foot on earth, the issue of his corporeal form and nature did not arise. Once he was claimed to be historical, acting on earth, the docetists had to resist, to advocate that, even if so, he was only *seemingly* a physical man. (Or, a non-physical Jesus may already have been a part of their message, and not a direct reaction to the historicizing trend.) One can envision that there were also those who resisted placing him on earth at all, denying that he had been here in any form. Thus, we see the dispute in 1 John against those who deny that he had “come in the flesh” (4:3), and a little later, Ignatius’ adamant claims to a fleshly historicity with basic biographical details.

These claims, it has to be stressed, cannot be backed up by appeals to documents or oral traditions, or by any sense that they are longstanding views held in the community. Not even the bishops and other clergy hold the correct view because of links to past teaching or past orthodoxy. Ignatius never makes the argument that ‘we have believed these things about Jesus for generations,’ much less that they were written down. He doesn’t say that ‘the apostles knew Jesus in the flesh and have passed on undeniable traditions about him.’ The docetists are never accused of ‘overturning’ established tradition, of trying to shove the Christian train into reverse. (Rather, they are simply “mad dogs” [Eph. 7:1], “false-hearted wolves” [Phil. 2:2], and “beasts in the form of men” [Sm. 4:1].) Ignatius’ truth is not time-honored, it is one of necessity. His argument is that the historical position must be so because it *needs* to be so. Without a Jesus in flesh, our sufferings are pointless. That is the extent of his pleading for historical veracity, and the legitimacy of his position over that of his opponents.

The second effect relates to those who are Jews or subscribe to Jewish tenets. It is one thing to compromise monotheism by postulating a separate divine person, a Son, in heaven, as Paul did. It is another to place him on earth and give him human flesh and blood. When elements of the Christian movement started to develop the latter idea, the Jewish-minded among them must have felt compelled to say, Stop, that’s too much! You can’t associate a human with God. And so in Ignatius’ circles, the “Judaizers” could also be found guilty of resisting the historical Jesus and “denying him,” as we see in Magnesians 9 and perhaps Smyrneans 5. They could be accused of “giving Jesus no place in our lives” and “failing to preach Jesus Christ” (Phil. 6). Some of them may have joined in the docetic chorus and compromised by adopting the ‘phantom body’ position.

The confusion about opposing groups, the mix of motifs found in Ignatius’ admonitions, the sense of a level playing-field: this picture is most easily explained by adopting the view that at the beginning of the second century, the wide and varied ‘Son and Savior’ salvation movement was a cauldron of different ideas, a competing variety in a state of flux. Some of it was moving toward a coalescing orthodoxy in bringing the spiritual Christ to earth and appropriating the Jewish heritage, other parts were moving toward a full-fledged gnosticism that rejected the world of flesh and regarded the Jewish Deity as a subordinate, evil God who was responsible for the hated world of matter. None of it was grounded in a genuine historical figure or set of events in the recent past. In Ignatius’ own world, which seems to have extended across Asia Minor, many

voices were raised with different ideas and ways of looking at saviors and salvation. Ignatius was simply trying to shout louder than the rest.

Finally, where did Ignatius get his biographical data? I have postulated elsewhere that it may ultimately proceed from Mark, that a Gospel written two or three decades earlier in a community not too far distant in Syria or Galilee, a Gospel not originally intended to reflect history, may have produced a gradual ‘leakage’ of ideas that Ignatius and other Christians of the region were exposed to. Some ideas could have come from the milieu that produced the later stages of Q. Many people could have found them appealing, adopting them with an increasing conviction. Perhaps this adoption was further encouraged by a wider trend toward the historicization of the spiritual Christ, as discussed above in regard to the epistle of Barnabas. I have tended to discount the suggestion (in my book review of Alvar Ellegard’s *Jesus—One Hundred Years Before Christ*) that it was Ignatius himself, or perhaps his circle, who came up with these biographical features, and this in turn influenced the first evangelist who set them within his Gospel. Such a scenario is not impossible, though it would require that all the Gospels be placed in a post-110 or so time frame. There are radical scholars and mythicists who advocate such a dating scheme, though I have reservations. But it cannot be ruled out.

The Nature of Jesus in Ignatius

From our earliest record to the early second century (outside the Gospels), one of the central threads is an attempt to define the nature of Jesus the spiritual Son. Those who made docetic claims were continuing in that tradition, in the face of the snowballing trend to bring him into matter and onto earth itself. They were defining his human nature when he came to earth in different terms than those of Ignatius. That alternate nature was hardly bizarre or unprecedented. Angels had long been looked on as having taken on the semblance of bodily form to appear to humans, and Satan and his evil brood in the lower realms of the heavens were believed to possess some kind of corporeal form. But it was not matter itself. It could be said that the ‘docetist’ position was more orthodox than that of Ignatius, for Paul and the early cultists had kept Christ in a spiritual realm, and this was all that the gnostic-leaning docetists were intent on doing. Their movement toward a stark dualism, however, the separation of spirit and matter into good and evil, was more radical.

What does the Son in Ignatius’ picture tell us?

The first thing we encounter in Ignatius’ view of Jesus Christ, in the inscription to the epistle to the Ephesians, is the phrase “Jesus Christ our God.” Jesus is declared to be a fully divine entity, inseparably joined to God himself. Paul never went quite this far, though he could speak of his Christ Jesus as an integral part of the heavenly Godhead, fulfilling divine functions similar to those of Wisdom and the Logos, as in 1 Corinthians 8:6. Ignatius calls Jesus “God” at a few other points in the epistles.

In Magnesians 6:1, Ignatius says that Christ was “with the Father from all eternity,” that is, he is pre-existent, again as Wisdom and the Logos were regarded, although it is not clear whether Ignatius sees the Son as subordinate, being an emanation of God. Probably so. The days of elevating the Jesus figure to absolute equality with the Father, as in the Trinity, seem not to have arrived until later, perhaps not until the Councils. Both the pre-existence and the blatant identification of Jesus *as God* go considerably beyond the portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Rather than see this as an evolution beyond the Gospel picture, it actually reflects the earlier Pauline Christ, who was seen as a transcendent divine entity. The Gospel Jesus, though syncretized with the cultic Christ, was essentially derived from the Q milieu, from the perception of a teaching prophet and wisdom sage, and the apocalyptic Son of Man. Ignatius’ roots lie with

the former, onto which he has grafted the human conception, perhaps from echoes of Mark. The Gospels, coming from the other direction, have not yet caught up to Ignatius' own world of a pre-existent Christ as full God.

In a few very revealing passages, Ignatius betrays an inseparability of God and Christ which does not properly fit his idea of Jesus as a recent man, a distinct personality on earth who had given rise to the faith. For Ignatius, Jesus could be said to be 'theocentric.' God himself is present and acting—and experiencing—in and through Jesus. This is one way of describing an 'emanation' of God, and it is an earlier, more primitive way of viewing the Son. It is ultimately grounded in the Logos, which (as in Philo) is virtually an abstract force given off by God: his thought, power, image. This force becomes the agency by which God reveals himself, contacts and saves humanity. In Ephesians 18:3, "God was now appearing in human form" defines Jesus as God himself taking on human nature. In Magnesians 8:2, God has "manifested himself through Jesus Christ his son, who is his Word proceeding from silence." It is even more strongly expressed in Polycarp 3:2. (Staniforth presents it in its seemingly metrical form, which may indicate an existing liturgical poem, or possibly one of Ignatius' own. The terms used indicate that the thought is applied to God himself.)

"...but also keep your eyes on Him who has no need of opportunities, being outside all time.

*Whom no senses can reveal
Was for us made manifest;
Who no ache or pain can feel
Was for us by pain opprest;
Willing all things to endure,
Our salvation to procure."*

Schoedel (*op.cit.*, p.20) acknowledges that Ignatius' reference to the "blood of God" (Eph. 1:1, which Staniforth softens to "divine blood") and the "passion/suffering of my God" (Rom. 6:3), indicate Ignatius' "undifferentiated...sense of the divinity of Christ." In other words, he lacks the sense of Christ as a fully distinct entity, or he is reflecting an earlier (and probably not too much earlier) form of expression which lacked that sense.

This close identification of Jesus with God, a degree of integration which sees God as manifesting himself and undergoing suffering through Jesus, is an indicator that the faith began, not with a man who created a belief that he was a part of God, but with a Godhead that came to be seen, through philosophical meditation, as containing a subordinate element, serving as an intermediary, revelatory and salvific agency. This heavenly Son became increasingly regarded as having entered the world of flesh, eventually to take on full human nature and live an earthly life. But the highly elevated nature of this Son, compared to the paucity of information and historical connection in regard to his perceived incarnation, strongly suggests that he began as the former and not the latter. We are brought back to Paul's mode of expression, his starting point in a Jesus who is a transcendent heavenly being never linked to a specific historical man. Ignatius betrays the same way of thinking, the same starting point, only a new dimension, still opaque and with few details attached, has been introduced.

Schoedel also remarks that "there is as yet no critical reflection in Ignatius on how the divine and the human can be joined in Christ." Indeed, before Ignatius, no one ever raises the point. Paul is unconcerned with understanding how God could become human and take on two natures, and we must conclude by many of his statements (as in 1 Corinthians 15:44-49) that this is because he had no concept of his Jesus *possessing* two natures. Ignatius raises the subject in Ephesians 7:2:

“...there is one Physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and yet not born, who is God in man, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Lake’s translation)

But as Schoedel says (see above), there is nothing in this passage suggesting that current Christian thinkers had to grapple with the concept of the divine-human duality in Jesus, nor does Ignatius engage his opponents on such an issue. The above verse (possibly a hymn, due to its rhythmic nature) shows for the first time that Christians are expressing that duality, but the idea has not been around long enough to generate critical examination.

Ignatius also expresses the idea of mystical union of believer with Christ. In Ephesians 4:2, the readers “are indeed members of his [God’s] Son’s Body,” and “parts of [Christ’s] own Body” in Trallians 11. None of the Gospels contain this idea of the believer being united with the savior god and being a part of a common “body” (a feature of mystery cult thinking), which places Ignatius in the line of Pauline mystical thought, not that of a Jesus of Galilean ministry.

In the Deep Silence of God

There is one passage in Ignatius’ letters which is overtly mythical, opening a window onto a previous phase of the faith before an historical Jesus was introduced. This is Ephesians 19, which I will quote in its entirety in the Staniforth translation.

“Mary’s virginity was hidden from the prince of this world; so was her child-bearing, and so was the death of the Lord. All these three trumpet-tongued secrets [literally, ‘three mysteries of a cry’: Bauer translates ‘cry’ as “(to be) loudly proclaimed”; the ANF as “of renown”] were brought to pass in the deep silence of God. How then were they made known to the world? [Literally, how was *he* manifested to the ‘*aiôsin*’—see below.] Up in the heavens a star gleamed out, more brilliant than all the rest; no words could describe its luster, and the strangeness of it left men bewildered [literally, it caused astonishment]. The other stars and the sun and moon gathered round it in chorus, but this star outshone them all. Great was the ensuing perplexity, where could this newcomer have come from, so unlike its fellows? Everywhere magic crumbled away before it; the spells of sorcery were all broken, and superstition received its death-blow. The age-old empire of evil was overthrown, for God was now appearing [literally, being manifest] in human form to bring in a new order, even life without end. Now that which had been perfected in the Divine counsels began its work; and all creation was thrown into a ferment over this plan for the utter destruction of death.”

Attempts to demonstrate that this passage is a hymn have proven inconclusive. Schoedel (*op.cit.*, p.88) settles on regarding it as “a product of Ignatius’ rhetorical methods,” though he could be putting in his own words a summary of a ‘cosmic myth’ that already existed in the community. Its resemblance to the gnostic redeemer myth has been pointed out, with its implications of a descent of the savior while hidden from the evil spirits, and his re-ascent to heaven as represented by the “star” which shines out and gains power over the world of evil in magic, sorcery and superstition, bringing in a new order. Some of these elements can be found in the Pauline epistles (e.g., Eph. 1:10 and 3:10), but perhaps the closest parallel is in the Ascension of Isaiah 9, in which the Son descends through the spheres of heaven, to be hung on a tree by the god of the firmament, Satan. There, Christ’s identity is hidden from the evil powers who “do not know who he is.” (See Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?)

The parallels are also striking in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8. There, God’s wisdom in Christ is also a hidden “mystery,” while “the rulers of this age” are unaware of the Lord of Glory’s identity and crucify him. The debate over the meaning of “*tôn archontôn tou aiônos toutou*” in 2:8 should be elucidated by Ignatius’ use of the identical phrase—with “ruler” in the singular—here and elsewhere as a reference to Satan, and not to any worldly authority. It makes a strong argument

for taking Paul's phrase as also referring to the evil powers of the lower heavens. (Schoedel is another scholar who concedes that this is the meaning of Paul's term "the rulers of this age.") Paul's "hidden wisdom of God" and Ignatius' "deep silence of God" convey the same thing: the spiritual realm of God where spiritual processes take place, and those to whom they are of most concern and whom they most affect are the spirit powers.

In fact, Ignatius' passage speaks of these "secrets" of God being "made known to the *aiôsin*." Both Staniforth and Lake translate the latter term as "the world," but this is an avoidance of the more direct meaning. There are other words Ignatius could have used to signify the world as a spatial area or the people that inhabit it. Instead, he uses the plural (dative) of "*aiôn*." This can mean "ages" in regard to an expanse of time, and the writer elsewhere uses it as such. But it can also mean supernatural beings, "Aeons," who inhabit the celestial spheres. Bauer's Lexicon provides such a meaning (def. 4), and suggests this as the meaning in Ignatius' Ephesians 19:2. Further, it regards this as the probable meaning in the Pauline Ephesians 2:2—"when you followed the aeon [spirit ruler] of this world" ("the age of this world" doesn't really make much sense)—as well as in Colossians 1:26—"hidden from the aeons and from the generations" (the spirits and the humans, since "from the ages and from the generations" would be a redundancy)—and in Ephesians 3:9, although it allows that other meanings in these passages are possible. Schoedel (*Ibid.*, p.91, n.24) supports the reading of supernatural beings in Ignatius.

Such a reading is internally supported. Ignatius asks how these things were made known to the world/aeons. Since he goes on to speak solely of the effects created in heaven—the "star" portion of the passage—and not of effects on a human audience, "aeons" is to be preferred. Staniforth's translation of "it left men bewildered" is not specified in the text, which merely says that the new star caused astonishment; and since this is enlarged on by reference to "the other stars, with the sun and moon gathered in chorus round this star" (Lake), we ought to be left in no uncertainty as to where this scene takes place.

Thus, if Ignatius means "how were these things revealed to the aeons," the spirit powers, we are squarely in the realm of the mythological, part of a family of passages in several documents which provide mutual support to each other, including the crucial 1 Corinthians 2:8. We need not make all the tortured readings most commentators feel are necessary to get around the plainest meaning of the passage. It represents a mythical outlook predating the adoption of the new historical Jesus. The virginity of Jesus' mother, the birth, and Jesus' very death itself, are mythological events that "came to pass (*epraxthê*, aorist passive of *prassô*)"—were wrought (Lake), performed, executed—within that mythological setting. To get around this, Staniforth suggests they were "prepared" in the silence of God. Schoedel notes that it could mean that these three things were "effected within the purpose or sphere of the divine" (*Ibid.*, p.91), but then chooses to drop them into history on the basis of the use of same verb in Magnesians 11 and Smyrneans 4:2 in connection with Ignatius' historical declarations about Jesus. The latter consideration is hardly conclusive. It is the context that determines the meaning we should draw, and *prassô* is an extremely common verb, used in all sorts of contexts.

In the earlier form of this myth, we are led to assume that the name of Mary did not appear (just as Paul does not give us her name in Galatians 4:4's "born of woman"); this is possibly Ignatius' own amendment. Schoedel suggests that the two elements at the head of this mythical scene, Jesus' conception by a virgin and his birth, are a direct mirroring of Isaiah 7:14 ("A virgin shall conceive and bear a son"). But he fails to follow through and conclude that these things are not based on historical traditions but are in fact mythical elements grounded in scripture, just as we can surmise in regard to Paul's Galatians 4:4 statement. The Christian myth before historicization was the product of meditation on scripture. Everything in the New Testament epistles points in this direction.

When we get to the “star” passage, we encounter some uncertainty. It is by means of this star that the Aeons learn of the conception, birth and death of Jesus—things already brought to pass. If this myth has ties to gnostic thought, the star could be seen as the ascended Christ himself, now shining out in heaven. It is after his death and exaltation that he gains the power to destroy magic and superstition, and the old empire of evil forces and death is brought to an end. Because gnostic mythology does not specifically use the image of a star in the ascension of the divine redeemer, but only light and glory, Schoedel and others claim the star refers to Jesus’ descent into the world, not his ascension, and their tendency is to relate it to the Star of Bethlehem, though not assuming that the latter is literally historical. The precise alignment of the star motif is not spelled out in this passage, and it may not matter. But if the plainer meaning of the opening sentences is adopted, that all activities of the Savior have already been accomplished, then the star in this sequence of thought must appear at the ascension and not at the point of birth.

It is quite possible that the Star of Bethlehem feature of Matthew’s Nativity story (it is missing in Luke’s) is derived from this sort of mythological background. Ignatius’ thought milieu is undeniably closer to elements of the Matthean Gospel than any other, and the similarity of many passages in Matthew to expressions in Ignatius is best explained by postulating that Matthew was being written in the same general area around the same time.

This “myth” in Ephesians 19, then, is a hold-over from the pre-historical Jesus phase of the Ignatian community. All its elements fit a mythological setting, including the wonder and confusion of the other stars as representing the spirit forces, good and bad, from whom the identity of Jesus has been hidden from “birth” to death. Under the historical scenario, it may well be questioned how Satan could be unaware of the birth and death of Jesus, taking place under the open skies of Judea and in the sight of many. If Ignatius sensed inherent contradictions, now that Jesus had died outside Jerusalem under sentence of Pontius Pilate, he shows no sign. But old modes of expression are often adapted to new understandings, while anomalies are glossed over or ignored.

Ignatius says that the three “mysteries,” Jesus’ conception, birth and death, were brought to pass in the “deep silence of God,” which although obscure, strongly suggests a spiritual realm that is inaccessible to human observation where God carries out his work of salvation. The word “silence” is “*hêsuxia*” and this word appears a few chapters earlier in another passage which commentators find obscure. In 15:1, Ignatius says that “the man who truly possesses the word of Jesus can also hear his silence.” Staniforth muses over and rejects a possible application to Jesus’ silence before the High Priest and Pilate, but he fails to offer any meaningful alternative. But here Jesus’ “silence” which the one possessing his “word” can penetrate suggests the same mythical significance as in the later passage. Jesus began as a spiritual entity who also worked in the deep and impenetrable mythical realm of God.

A Rite of Chrisma

Finally, a quick look at the second Gospel-like anecdote in the Ignatian epistles. In Ephesians 17:1, Ignatius tells his readers:

“The reason for the Lord’s acceptance of the precious ointment on his head was to exhale the fragrance of incorruptibility upon his church. So you must never let yourselves be anointed with the malodorous chrism of the prince of this world’s doctrines, or he may snatch you into his own keeping and away from the life that lies before you.”

That the “chrism” refers to an anointing at the time of baptism (here contrasted with the Devil’s anointing), part of a rite of initiation, is a common interpretation and undoubtedly correct. The first Johannine epistle, probably coming from the same geographical area of

northern Syria a little earlier than Ignatius, also refers to a rite of chrism (2:20/27). That Ignatius' is alluding to the Gospel episode of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany is also a common suggestion, but this is far less certain. Not only are no historical details attached to it, the reference bears all the marks of a traditional cultic explanation for the community's rite, in that sectarian thinking tends to develop myths about the founder establishing the ritual or performing some act upon which the ritual is allegedly based, or which gives it its meaning. In this passage, Ignatius refers to the rite of chrism, and makes his remark about the Lord, specifically to explain a certain aspect of the rite's significance. This is an example of the phenomenon which anthropologists such as Mircea Eliade have long noted, that of 'ritual producing explanatory myth.' In this same class, we may place Paul's scene of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, something he says he has "received from the Lord." Here Paul may be inventing on his own and claiming revelation, attempting to impart a sacramental quality to the communal meal whose spirit he feels the Corinthians are abusing. (See Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel.)

Again, Ignatius does not appeal to any Gospel account or apostolic tradition as the source of this information. The alleged similarity to Matthean wording (26:7) relates only to the word "ointment" and the phrase "upon his head," basic ideas that can hardly avoid being expressed in a common way. As for the possible derivation of Ignatius' idea from a more general oral tradition, this is undermined when one notes that no consistent tradition is in evidence in the Gospels, since both Luke and John portray their equivalent scene as an anointing of Jesus' *feet*. It is much safer to conclude that Matthew may have derived his scene from mythical precedents such as we see in Ignatius.

Postscript

From the vantage point of the mythicist position, it is safe to say that not a single early Christian document outside the Gospels from the first hundred years of the faith—and some extending beyond that—actually says the things that orthodox scholarship would like them to say and which it has done its best to make them say. From the 19th century translator of Minucius Felix (in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*), who labeled Octavius' denigration of the idea of a crucified man and his cross as "A reverent allusion to the Crucified, believed in and worshipped as God," to J. H. Charlesworth's scouring of the Odes of Solomon in search of some word that could refer, no matter how obscurely, to the resurrection, Christian scholars have imposed one small segment of the early Christian documentary record, the Gospels and Acts, upon their reading of everything else.

The Hellenistic era was the age of personal salvation, through the individual's mystical union with a personal savior god. While the Greeks looked only for the ascent of the soul to the divine, Jews and Christians looked for a place in the Kingdom of God. While Paul did not envision this Kingdom as located on earth in the material world, he still looked for a resurrection in a transformed body, made of spirit material like that of Christ. The god's own death and resurrection in the heavenly dimension guaranteed that of the believer, but as Christian thought moved increasingly toward resurrection in the flesh, the divine redeemer who was entrusted with this role had to do so by taking part in the same flesh: to save it he must enter it. But the exact nature of his coming to earth was not universally accepted. Its precise nature had to be worked out. Some circles along the way resisted the more concrete manifestations 'in flesh.' The conflict first appears in 1 John 4, although exactly what the writer of that epistle conceived of as constituting "in flesh," or the precise position of his opponents, is not clear. It is notable that, writing probably a decade or two before Ignatius, he did not enumerate any of the bishop of Antioch's historical biographical details, and the basis of his own belief was revelation through the Spirit.

There was one way to ensure that a divine Savior had fully partaken in flesh and human nature, that his redemptive acts were sufficient to guarantee the benefits to his devotees: place him in history. This was a need which the equivalent salvation religions among the Greeks did not so urgently feel—probably because they had no need or desire to perpetuate the flesh. Though they conceived of their savior gods as ‘approaching matter’ in some way, of having a body and experiences that possessed the “likeness” of those of humans, they were content to leave them in mythical times and settings. The earliest Christians as well were content with this much: a Christ Jesus, an Anointed Savior, incarnated in a mythical part of God’s heavens, grappling with the evil spirits who were one of the chief concerns of both Deity and humanity. Man as a whole was separated from God largely because Satan and his evil angels were the rulers of this age, cutting off earth from heaven. They were the cause of much misery, misfortune and unbelief in the world, including the original Fall. Jesus had a job to do in the heavens and in the underworld—perhaps his principal job—to destroy the power of the demons, restore the unity of the universe, and rescue the souls of the righteous.

The victory over the evil powers would automatically set the scene for salvation and a new age. The righteous who believed in Christ Jesus would enter the Kingdom when Jesus came to earth to judge the world. A simple, efficient system. Some time before Ignatius, it ceased to be enough. Jesus had to have entered history and material flesh. His parentage had to be elucidated, though he kept the universal paternity of the ancient world gods and heroes as son of a Deity by a virgin. The agency of his suffering had to become a human force (as was humanity’s own), the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, with an active part played by the hostile and despised Jewish authorities. The biographical details were largely supplied from scripture. But there was another, fortuitous source for his activities in flesh: the milieu of Kingdom preaching centered in Galilee. Probably by the grace of the writer of Mark, the imagined founder of that movement became wedded to the savior god come to suffer and die on earth. Thus the single most dramatic and influential historical event in the planet’s history, the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, entered human consciousness. Before Ignatius, no Christian document—allowing for the inauthenticity of 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 and a second century provenance for 1 Timothy—refers to it in that context.

Ignatius himself clearly shows the fundamental impulse for this development, for the historicization of Jesus and his ‘true’ human experience of suffering and exaltation. It is not because it is so recorded, not because some reliable account of it exists to be read and drawn upon. It is not because these traditions have been passed down through the generations since the events themselves. It is not because some carefully thought-out theology and process of philosophical deduction urged such a doctrine upon him, for this, too, Ignatius never offers us in his letters. It is for purely subjective reasons, personal and immediate, that he “knows and believes” that Jesus Christ was truly born of Mary, truly suffered under Pilate, was truly crucified in human flesh and rose in the same state. It is so because “by believing in his death you may escape death” (Tral. 2:1), and here he is drawing on the universal pattern of Hellenistic salvation thought: the paradigmatic parallel that has both deity and believer undergoing the same experiences. It is because if Christ’s suffering was only a semblance, then Ignatius is “dying in vain” (Tral. 10:1). If all of Christ’s experiences were simply an illusion, then his experiences too are only an illusion (Sm. 4:2). This is the true source of all theology: human need. What we need we will create theologies to support. God’s Anointed Savior arose when certain circles within the Hellenistic Jewish milieu created their own divine intermediary to their increasingly inaccessible God, and a Messiah to rescue them and bring them into their destiny. This Christ Jesus emerged into history when the need of the individual for salvation became paramount and only a Jesus who had been fully human could accomplish the task.

Before long, the political advantages of possessing a human figure as the fount of the movement also emerged, providing a chain of authority and correct doctrine that could be traced back to him who had established it, and the Jews could be accused of rejecting a human figure who had been in their midst. If the first apostles could be claimed to have seen Jesus in the flesh, the assurance of human resurrection in the flesh was secure, but it could only be available through the institution that preserved those traditions and guaranteed their historical veracity. The power over the human mind is the power most sought after, and human fear is its most vulnerable channel. Humanity's most primitive fear is the fear of death, and the story of Jesus evolved to take away that fear.

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The Sound Of Silence

200 Missing References to the Gospel Jesus in the New Testament Epistles

* * * * *

Introduction

Do the New Testament epistles tell us anything about the Jesus of the Gospels? Are the epistle writers aware of such a man, and do they have any knowledge of the Gospel story?

New Testament commentators have long remarked, frequently with some perplexity, on the dearth of references in the early Christian correspondence to details of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. "The early church lost all interest in the earthly career of the man they turned into God." This has been the standard method of explaining the extensive silence on the human Jesus to be found in the canonical epistles. I have questioned the feasibility of such an eventuality taking place, the likelihood that the elevation of a man to Godhead would—or could—entail the complete dismissal of his earthly incarnation as unimportant or of no interest to the first two generations of Christian believers. Other rationalizations put forward to explain the silence have included the claim that, since every epistle writer knew that the details of Jesus' life and ministry were familiar to their readers (which would be a very questionable assumption in itself), no one bothered to make even a passing reference to any of those details, even in places where they would naturally come to mind. J. P. Holding, in his rebuttal to my views—see Reader Feedback—has put it that "there was no need" to mention all these elements of the Gospel account.

I have already attacked the rationality of such arguments in several places on the site. (For example, the response to William in Reader Feedback set 19.) What I am concerned with here is to provide a comprehensive picture of this pervasive silence on the Gospel Jesus contained in the New Testament epistles. While many aspects and examples of it have been touched on throughout my articles, the full extent of it, the nitty-gritty of it, may come as a surprise to many readers. In the present feature, "The Sound of Silence," I will point out and comment on virtually all the identifiable places in the Pauline corpus (Paul and pseudo-Paul), in Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 John and Jude, where a reference to some Gospel element, some mention of the historical Jesus, would seem natural, or even called for. One would, of course, not expect to find such a reference in every single instance. But to find it missing in so many instances, covering all aspects of the life and death portrayed in the Gospels, is an astonishing phenomenon which cannot be blithely dismissed or explained away. This is a silence which cuts across every early document, through several authors and a multiplicity of situations, and it creates a very powerful and compelling "argument from silence."

My personal catalogue of silences in the epistles numbers around 250, but I will trim that, along with some combining of closely related ones, to a figure of the most clearly identifiable 200. I'll start by extracting from these a "Top 20", the ones I find most arresting and most representative. This will be followed by the remainder, going through each document in canonical order. Along the way, I will briefly glance at related silences found in other, non-canonical epistles and early Christian documents, such as 1 Clement and the Didache. I will wrap up this catalogue with some general observations in a Postscript.

To provide a balance, I will list in an Appendix the 20 passages in the epistles which I consider could be said to constitute an arguable reference to the Gospel Jesus and his story, giving brief explanations for them and pointing out where on my site I deal with them in greater depth. Many of these references I regard as derived from scripture, which was the source for so many of the details which ended up in the Gospels themselves. Only two of these passages, possibly a third, would I put down to later interpolation, the first with much support by liberal scholars: 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, with its reference to "the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus," and 1 Timothy 6:13, with its reference to Pilate. (I will direct the reader to full discussions of these two items.) The third, a possible marginal gloss, is Galatians 1:19's "the brother of the Lord" in reference to James, which I discuss in the Appendix. And those who have read my site (especially Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel) will know that the passage about Jesus' words at "the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:23f) is readily explainable—and Paul himself tells us so—as personal revelation about a mythological 'event.' Personal revelation from Christ in heaven—a view held by quite a few scholars, too—is also the source of Paul's three or four "words of the Lord" (which includes the Lord's Supper scene), and I will deal with this particular item at length in the Appendix.

The Argument from Silence

Before getting under way, let's take a brief look at the "argument from silence." This is a method of reasoning which is often condemned by scholars in the field of New Testament research (though more widely accepted in other areas). But it is an important and legitimate element in the Jesus-as-myth theory. It states in one of its applications that if a document fails to mention something in a context where we would strongly expect to find it, this would tend to show (depending on the state of all the evidence) that the subject is not known to the author and therefore may not exist.

We might illustrate the principle involved with this analogy. If a deceased man's descendant claims that the man once won a lottery, yet there is no contemporary record of such a win, no entry of a large sum in his bank statements, no mention of it in his diaries and letters, no memory of a spending spree, if on his deathbed he told someone he never got a break in his life, if he died of starvation, etc., we would have some good reason to use the argument from silence to say that the claim is probably false, that in fact he had never won a lottery. (See also my "parable" which opens the book review of Robert Funk's *Honest to Jesus*.)

Morton Smith, in condemning one of G. A. Wells' articles (M. Smith, "The Historical Jesus", in *Jesus in History and Myth*, Prometheus Books, p.47), calls the argument "absurd," since "silence can be explained by reasons other than ignorance." The latter may sometimes be so, but it points to the fact that the conditions under which the argument is used must determine its validity. Ernst Haenchen, in his commentary on Acts (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, p.476), admits it is justified when everything urges the writer to mention something, yet he fails to do so; Haenchen uses it himself to support a contention about Paul. We must therefore ask, in looking at each silence, whether we have good and strong reason to expect that a Christian writer would have said something here about Jesus, and whether there seems any good reason to explain why he did not. If, for example, the writer is making an argument, and he fails to bring in a supposedly well-known point about Jesus that would serve him well, or if a description or discussion invites obvious comparison to an element of the Gospel story and we do not get it, we are justified in finding the omission at least curious.

A silence can be especially compelling if it is expressed in a way which seems to *exclude* the idea or involvement of an historical Gospel Jesus, and there are many cases like this. Finally, the frequency of the silences has to be given weight. Taken individually, one failure to mention

Jesus may be an oversight, a quirk of the author, an odd characteristic of one document or writer; but when it occurs in document after document, in writer after writer, when it extends to every single aspect of Jesus' earthly life, such pervasive silence must mean something and cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Nor is it valid to rationalize that Paul and the other early writers did not need to mention a given point about Jesus because their readers were already familiar with it. Perhaps so, but do none of us, in our letters and conversations, ever insert things our listeners are familiar with? We might have little to say to each other if we didn't. Besides, it is insupportable in itself to presume that all these audiences to whom the epistle writers are addressing themselves could have been assumed to be so familiar with all the details of Jesus' life and teachings that everyone would consider it pointless to mention them. Furthermore, such reasoning hardly applies in the context of argument. An argument is delivered more forcefully precisely by appealing to a point that *does* mean something to the reader or listener, something the audience is familiar with. Adding, for example, the simple phrase "as Jesus himself said" could not help but support many of the views these letter writers are urging, and there hardly seems any good reason, especially a blanket one, for why they would all consistently fail to do so.

"Explanations" are often offered to explain Paul's silence, such as that he had never met Jesus, had different agendas than the other apostles, had particular sensitivities to the authenticity of his own credentials. Such objections falter on one general consideration. Every other epistle writer expresses himself in exactly the same way as Paul in regard to the silence about an historical Jesus. This includes those who wrote later in Paul's name (Colossians, Ephesians, etc.), writers who would have had no reason, nor the necessary insight, to faithfully reproduce Paul's own idiosyncrasies. Many of the individual reasons offered for Paul's reticence on the historical Jesus also fail upon closer examination: they don't "work" when you bring other considerations into play. I have dealt with such points in many places on the site and many will arise in the present feature in the course of examining the passages themselves.

An Opening Summation

Finally, to give the reader an idea of the depth of silence the epistles demonstrate, the blackness of the void they contain in regard to the Gospel Jesus and his story, let me preface my itemization of this silence with a summation. Taking into account my two or three interpolations, and Paul's few "words of the Lord" as a product of revelation (with the Lord's Supper scene a mythical creation), let's put it this way:

If we were to rely entirely on the early Christian correspondence, we would know virtually nothing about the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in the Gospels. We would not know where he was born or when. We would not even know the era he lived in. We would be ignorant of the names of his parents, where he grew up, where he preached. Or even *that* he preached. We would not be able to identify a single one of his ethical teachings, for although the epistles often make moral pronouncements very close to the ones Jesus speaks in the Gospels, no writer ever attributes them to him.

Nor would we be aware that he performed miracles. Not that he healed, that he cast out demons, that he raised the dead to life. We would not know that he had been baptized, nor would we meet the figure of John the Baptist who performed that rite on him. We would not know that Jesus had walked the hills of Galilee (or the waters of its sea), that he tramped the dusty wildernesses of Judea or entered the ancient walls of Jerusalem. Did he alienate the Jewish leaders, who plotted against him and ultimately bore the stigma of having killed him? We would know nothing about that. Did he celebrate a Last Supper with his disciples? We would not know that for certain. His

betrayal, Judas: he and his evil deed would be lost to us forever, as would another betrayal, the denial of him by Peter, his chief apostle.

And what of Pontius Pilate, his executioner? He surfaces only with the letters of Ignatius and in 1 Timothy, both written early in the second century—and there is some doubt about the authenticity of the latter reference. As for the details surrounding the climax of Jesus' life: his trials before the Jewish Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, his brutal crucifixion, details of which should have been indelibly burned into the consciousness of every Christian writer and believer from the day they transpired, nothing of them would have come down to us. Not the words he spoke—or refused to speak—before his accusers, not the scourging and the crown of thorns, not the raising up of the cross between two thieves or the words he spoke as he hung upon it. Nor would we know where that cross was raised, for the names of Calvary and Golgotha are never mentioned. We would not have heard about the earthquake, the rending of the Temple veil, nor the darkness that covered the earth for three hours at midday during the long agony. As to where he was buried, we would not know that either, and the dramatic story of the finding of the empty tomb three days later would have passed into oblivion along with all the other details of this mysterious life and career. With only the first century Christian epistles to go on, the darkness over the man who is said to have founded the greatest religion in world history would be complete.

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On the Translations: I have drawn on several translations of the New Testament passages, sometimes splicing, sometimes making personal alterations, all with an eye to providing English versions which get to the literal meaning of the original and avoid drawing on Gospel preconceptions, as so many translations do. A notation in square brackets is given after each quoted passage to indicate the principal translation(s) used; an "ED" indicates a strong element of my own in the mix.

Optional Reading: For some passages I have included additional comments which are designated as optional reading. These are in separate paragraphs with smaller print (like this one) and enclosed in square brackets.

"TOP 20"

"The Sound of Silence" begins with a selection of 20 missing references, chosen from the full spectrum of the epistles, silences which should strike any observer as being notably surprising and perplexing. Within this group of 20, I have tried to cover all the principal aspects of the Gospel story, while at the same time demonstrating what the epistles show us to be the true nature of the early Christian movement and its view of the Christ it preached.

¶ 1. -Romans 1:19-20

¹⁹For all that may be known of God by men lies plain before their eyes; indeed God himself has disclosed it to them. ²⁰His invisible attributes . . . have been made visible . . . in the things he has made. [NEB]

My first choice is a somewhat innocuous-seeming passage, and yet one which reveals a telling void in the mind of an early Christian writer like Paul. Unlike later commentators from the 2nd century on, Paul here shows no conception that Jesus on earth had been a reflection of God himself, the Son demonstrating the Father's invisible attributes in his own incarnated person. Even more important, how could Paul fail to conceive and express the idea that Jesus himself was the primary revealer of "all that may be known of God"? It is difficult to explain how any Christian writer, cognizant of a recent life and ministry of Jesus, could show such a void on any role played by Jesus on earth, and yet we meet that silence at every turn, as we shall see.

¶ 2. - Romans 16:25-27

This is one of several passages throughout the epistles which give us a clear picture of the nature of the early Christian movement. It tells us the source of Paul's knowledge about the Christ, and how the movement started. At the same time, it leaves no room in the picture for an historical Jesus.

²⁵Glory be to God who has strengthened you, through my gospel and proclamation about Jesus Christ, through his [God's] revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages, ²⁶now disclosed and made known through the prophetic writings at the command of the eternal God that all nations might obey through faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ. Amen. [Various, ED]

The concept of a divine "mystery," a secret kept by God for long ages, recurs several times in the Pauline corpus (cf. Col. 1:26 and 2:2, Eph. 3:5, Titus 1:3, etc.). The plain meaning of the above words would seem to define the mystery as Christ himself, now revealed through Paul's gospel (and that of others) after being hidden for long ages. There is no occasion for understanding any incarnation in these words, and we have the added element that what is known and proclaimed to the world comes through the scriptures.

The passage is also full of "revelation" words: *apocalypsis*, the verbs *phaneroo* and *gnoridzo*. Such words are used throughout the epistles to describe what has happened in the present period (cf. 1 Pet. 1:20, 2 Tim. 1:10, etc.). This language marks the 1st century as an age of revelation, when inspired knowledge came through a new reading of the sacred texts. It is scripture, and ultimately God, to which preachers like Paul regularly point as backing for their claims, not the remembered life and teachings of Jesus. The "mystery" has resided in the sacred writings, awaiting the inspirational key God has provided to unlock it.

[Here is a good example of the opportunity to read Gospel preconceptions into a passage. Several translations use the phrase "through my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ," with the possible implication that it is the preaching *by* Christ that is meant. The Greek is "*to kerygma Iesou Christou*" with "Jesus Christ" being a genitive which should be taken as objective, that is, Jesus Christ is the object of the preaching, not the one doing it. "*Kerygma*" in the epistles consistently refers to the preaching of apostles like Paul, with Jesus as the content of the message. Bauer's Lexicon specifies this phrase as meaning "preaching about Jesus Christ." The NAB is surprising lucid in the meaning of the entire passage, with its: ". . . the gospel I proclaim when I preach Jesus Christ, the gospel which reveals the mystery hidden for many ages but now manifested through the writings of the prophets . . ." Between the long-hidden mystery and its decipherment from scripture by those like Paul, there is no room for an historical Jesus.

In passages like this we detect no sense that Jesus had recently been on earth, revealing himself through his own preaching. Scholars like to claim that the mystery now disclosed refers to God's long-intended *plan* for salvation. But even were this the meaning, did Jesus himself not have a key role in disclosing that plan, in disclosing himself as its cornerstone? Yet Paul has left no room or role here for Jesus' career; instead, he places the focus of revelation and the coming of salvation entirely upon apostles like himself.]

¶ 3. - 1 Thessalonians 2:2

. . . we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. [RSV]

Early Christian writers like Paul are constantly referring to the message they carry as the "gospel of God." They also talk of the work of God, the saving actions of God, the call of God (cf. Romans 1:16, 3:24, 1 Cor. 1:9, Phil. 1:6, Gal. 4:7, etc.). If these apostles were preaching a message about an historical Jesus who had himself taught about God and his own relationship to him, surely they would style it the "gospel of Jesus." Why is there no mention in the epistles of an earthly ministry of Jesus? On the other hand, if Jesus is a spiritual figure, a "mystery" known only through scripture and God's revelation of him, then Paul's message is indeed the gospel of God (see especially Romans 1:1-4), and God is the primary "Savior" (see also Titus 1:3).

¶ 4. - 1 Thessalonians 4:9

Now, about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. [NIV]

An astonishing silence on Paul's part. Was not the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching the love commandment? Could Paul possibly be ignorant of that? What Christian, when admonishing the believer to show love to fellow human beings, would choose to say that God was the teacher of such a doctrine and ignore the entire weight and focus of Jesus' ministry? Yet this silence on the love command recurs consistently throughout the epistles: see Romans 13:8, 1 Cor. 13:1, Gal. 5:14, Eph. 5:1, James 2:8, 1 & 2 John (passim). Note that here it is not a case of failing to refer to something because everyone already knew it; Paul's statement is an *exclusion* of any such assumption that Jesus had taught about love.

[J. P. Holding has a very strained explanation for this startling phenomenon, claiming that since Jesus spoke in God's name, all these teachings are correctly ascribed to God. I pointed out in my response to him—see Reader Feedback—that it is inconceivable that all Christian letter writers would conform to such an esoteric consideration and deliberately avoid attributing any teachings to Jesus himself. See the section "A Twenty-Pound Gorilla" (his title) in my response to him for a thorough summary of the situation we face regarding the silences in the epistles: Response to J. P. Holding]

▮ 5. - 1 Peter 3:9

Do not repay evil with evil, or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. [NIV]

Even the Jesus Seminar regards the admonition to "turn the other cheek" as authentic to a preaching Jesus. And yet the writer of 1 Peter (presumably Jesus' own chief disciple) can express the above sentiments without so much as a glance at the words recorded in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount: "Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left" (5:39); and "Love your enemies" (5:44). The epistle writer gives us not even an "as Jesus himself taught us." It is not to be expected that every writer would provide such a phrase on every occasion, but a reference to an earthly Jesus and his words would seem natural in such a context, both to strengthen the authority of the action being urged by the writer, and to honor Jesus as the source. With the possible exception of two "words of the Lord" in 1 Corinthians (which are often interpreted as directives Paul believes he has received directly from Christ in heaven: see the Appendix and "Part One" in the Main Articles), we never get such an attribution from any epistle writer.

▮ 6. - Galatians 2:8

⁷... [the Jerusalem apostles] acknowledged that I had been entrusted with the gospel for gentiles as surely as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for Jews. ⁸For God ["he"] whose actions made Peter an apostle to the Jews, also made me an apostle to the gentiles. [NEB]

Not only are the epistles silent on Jesus the teacher, they are silent on any appointment of apostles by Jesus on earth. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:18, 2 Cor. 10:13, Eph. 2:20). Here Paul identifies both his own and Peter's call to apostleship as coming from God. (The Greek has the pronoun "he" where the NEB inserts "God" and this is the way most translators interpret it. Some translations leave the "he" but none I am aware of changes it to "Jesus".)

Moreover, Paul is clearly allowing for no distinction in quality or origin between his apostleship and that of Peter. In all the argument over the legitimacy of his credentials as an apostle and the opposition he faced from other preachers of the Christ (e.g., 2 Cor. 10 & 11), can we believe that no one would ever have used against him the fact that others had been apostles of Jesus during his lifetime, whereas Paul had not? Yet Paul shows no sign that such an issue was ever raised, and never addresses such a consideration.

¶ 7. - Titus 1: 2-3

². . . *Yes, it is eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ and now in his own good time he has brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior. [NEB/NIV]*

Here is another passage in the epistles which draws a picture of what has happened in the present period, leaving no room for any role Jesus might have played in recent salvation history. In the past lie God's promises of eternal life, and his first action on those promises is the present revelation to apostles like Paul who had gone out to proclaim the message. Jesus' own proclamation of eternal life, his own person as the embodiment of that life (as the Gospel of John so memorably puts it), has been shut out.

Note the reference to "God our Savior." The term "Savior," throughout the epistles, is applied in the vast majority of cases (cf. 1 Tim. 4:10) to God, and only in a small minority to Christ Jesus. This does not speak for a strong sense of immediacy for Jesus in the minds of his followers, or for the role he had played in the historical events of Calvary and the rising from the tomb. Instead, while Jesus was the Son who had undergone sacrifice, no one had witnessed this event, since it had taken place in the spiritual realm (like the salvific acts of all the savior gods of the day). The immediate agency in the present time has been God, revealing his Son and the redemptive activities of that Son. Thus, to the minds of men like Paul and his successors, including the writer of Titus, there is a primary sense of *God* being the "Savior" and providing them with *his* gospel.

¶ 8. - 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

You have received the grace of God; do not let it go for nothing. God's own words are: "In the hour of my favour I gave heed to you, On the day of deliverance I came to your aid." The hour of favour has now come; now, I say, has the day of deliverance dawned. [NEB]

Another blatant passage which moves from God's predictions of the past, contained in scripture, and the present moment of salvation now being put into effect by God. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8, seeing it as God's ancient promise that a time will arrive when he will come to humanity's aid and grant salvation. But what is that time? It is one thing for Paul, as he often does, to focus on his own apostolic career to the exclusion of any mention of Jesus' ministry. It is quite another for him to claim, as he does here, that the prophetic words of scripture foretell not the time of Jesus' life as "the hour of favour," not Jesus' acts of sacrifice and resurrection as "the day of deliverance," but Paul's own activities and his preaching of the Christian message!

Luke at least could recognize the monumental inappropriateness of this (if he had even read Paul), for in 4:19 of his Gospel, he has Jesus in a Nazareth synagogue read a similar passage from Isaiah (61:1-2) and declare to the startled assembly that it is he to whom this sacred prophecy refers.

Note once again how the passage quoted above begins with an exclusive focus on God as the one doing the work of the present time; grace has come from him. Paul seems impervious to any thought of a role in this culminating period of salvation history for the man he is supposedly preaching.

¶ 9. - 1 Corinthians 15:12-16

¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. [NASB/NIV]

There are some devastating implications to be drawn from this passage. Paul expresses himself as though the raising of Christ from the dead is a matter of faith, not of historical record as evidenced by eyewitness to a physical, risen Jesus at Easter. He is so adamant about the necessity to believe that the dead will be raised, that he is prepared to state—and he repeats it four times—that if they are not, then Christ himself "has not been raised." If men he knew had witnessed the actual return of Jesus from the grave, I do not think he would have thought to make even a rhetorical denial of it.

Moreover, the verb for "witness" (*martureo*) is often used in the sense of witnessing to, of declaring one's belief in, an item of faith, not of factual record (though it can mean this in some contexts). Such a meaning here is strongly supported by what follows this verb: *kata tou theou*, or "against God." Translators often seem uncertain of the exact import of this phrase, but Bauer's Lexicon firmly declares it as meaning "give testimony *in contradiction to God*." The idea that Paul is trying to get across here is that if in fact God did *not* raise Jesus from death (which would have to be the conclusion, he says, if all of the dead are not raised) then, rhetorically speaking, he and other apostles have been contradicting God and lying about Jesus' resurrection.

The point is, and it's unmistakable, Paul is saying that knowledge about Jesus' raising has come from God, and that his own preaching testimony, true or false, is something which relates to information which has come from God—in other words, through revelation. Not history, not apostolic tradition about recent events on earth. In all this discussion about the trueness of Christ's resurrection, Paul's standard is one of faith, faith based on God's testimony—meaning, in scripture. (Cf. Romans 8:25, 10:9, 1 Thess. 4:14.) Historical human witness plays no part.

[It may be claimed that the famous passage just before this, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul's statement of his gospel that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (*kata tas graphas*), that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures," followed (v. 5-8) by a listing of all those who "saw" him, constitutes an appeal to historical witness. But we note that Paul twice says that his gospel is derived from scripture, for such a meaning can be taken from the *kata tas graphas*. We also note that in the subsequent discussion (v. 12-16) about whether Christ is raised or not, Paul does not repeat or refer to that list of "seeings" as evidence that Christ was raised. Why not? Because the list refers to a series of visions of the spiritual Christ (Paul includes his own, an acknowledged vision, using exactly the same language for them all), a Christ who, as part of the scripture-based gospel about him, is declared to have been raised on the third day. (The latter point comes from Hosea 6:2, not the Gospel chronology of Easter.) These "events" of Paul's gospel were part of the higher spiritual world of myth, and thus there is no immediate sequential relationship between the "raising" and the occurrence of the visions, which is why the latter are not stated in either spot as a proof of Christ's resurrection. See my Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel for a full

discussion of the 1 Cor. 15:3-8 passage. See also this passage in the file on 1 & 2 Corinthians, below.]

But there is yet another important silence to highlight in this passage. Paul is most anxious to persuade his readers of the feasibility of human resurrection. If one accepts certain Gospel accounts, or assumes that such traditions very soon developed, ready evidence lay to hand. Stories of the revival of Jairus' daughter, the astounding emergence of Lazarus from his tomb (not to mention Matthew's recording of corpses rising from their graves at Jesus' crucifixion), would have provided Paul with undeniable proof for his readers that in fact humans *could* be resurrected from death. Lazarus might still have to die again, but an eternal resurrection would surely be seen as prefigured by the temporary ones granted by Jesus on earth, and there is no way Paul would not have appealed to these miracles in his argument.

Nor would he have passed up an appeal to Jesus' own promises on the matter. Luke records these sayings: "You will be repaid on the day when good men rise from the dead" (14:14); and: "Those who have been judged worthy of a place in the other world and of the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, for they are not subject to death any longer" (20:35). The Gospel of John, too, is pervaded by Jesus' promise that "he who believes in me will have life everlasting." Had such words, or such traditions about Jesus' miracles, been circulating in the Christian communities of Paul's time, there would have been no need for his plaintive inquiry: "How can you say there is no resurrection from the dead?"

Indeed, this sort of consideration discredits the entire rationalization for Paul's silence on the historical Jesus and his ministry, that he "had no interest in Jesus' earthly life." Paul had an undeniable interest in the question of the resurrection of the dead, as he did in many other matters, and if Jesus had preached about such things while on earth, Paul could not help but have been profoundly interested in what Jesus had to say on these matters and the examples he had set. Not to mention the inevitable interest his congregations would have had in such things. Paul's letters should be full of references to what the historical Jesus, the incarnated Son of God, had said and done while he was on earth.

¶ 10. - James 5:10

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [NIV]

The little epistle of James probably has more silences per square inch than any other New Testament document, but none of them are as striking as this one. How could the writer not draw on Jesus himself as the best and most compelling example when urging his readers to show patience in the face of suffering? Even if the Gospels were not yet in existence when this early epistle was written (many date it to the mid-1st century), oral tradition would surely have progressed to the point where Jesus' behavior before Pilate and his Jewish judges would entail such an idea. Here there is very much a "need" to refer to Jesus, even if the reader were familiar with the fact.

¶ 11. - Romans 6:2-4

²We died to sin: how can we live in it any longer? ³Have you forgotten that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus we were baptized into his death? ⁴By baptism we were buried with him, and lay dead, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendour of the Father, so also we might set one foot upon the new path of life.
[NEB]

If any defining moment of Jesus' career had impressed itself on early Christians, it would surely have been its inauguration: that dramatic scene amid the waters of the Jordan, with a fiery John in camel's hair coat crying for repentance and thundering his doom-laden warnings upon the crowd. What an impact it must have made when Jesus received John's sudden deferential homage, when he immersed himself in the waters of the river, to emerge with the dove and God's voice descending upon him from heaven. Even if the Holy Spirit and the divine words were a later elaboration, they indicate that the incident of Jesus' baptism must very soon have been invested with mythic significance.

Yet one would never know it from Paul. For Paul, baptism is the prime sacrament of Christian ritual. Through baptism, the convert dies to his old, sinful life and rises to a new one. Through baptism, the believer partakes of the spiritual body of Christ. In Romans 6:1-11 he breaks down the baptismal ritual into its mystical component parts. Yet never do any of those parts relate to the scene of Jesus' own baptism. No significance is given to any details of that scene, for from 1st century writers like Paul we would never even know that Jesus had been baptized.

If Paul had known a tradition that the Holy Spirit had descended upon Jesus at his baptism, that he had been welcomed by God himself as his Beloved Son, can we possibly believe that Paul would not have integrated such motifs into his own presentation of the rite? Paul everywhere stresses that believers have been adopted as sons of God, as in Romans 8:14-17. How could he fail to seize on the Father's words to the divine Son and apply them to the baptized convert? In that latter Romans passage, he also says that "the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children." Since Paul's baptism involved the descent of the Holy Spirit into the initiate, it is unthinkable that he would not point to the descent of the Spirit into Jesus at *his* baptism as an archetypal parallel, had any such tradition existed.

And where is the Baptist? In Christian mythology there is hardly a more commanding figure short of Jesus himself. The forerunner, the herald, the scourge of the unrepentant, the voice crying aloud in the wilderness. Until the Gospels appear, John is truly lost in the wilderness, for no Christian writer ever refers to him. Even as late as the turn of the 2nd century, the writer of 1 Clement is silent on John when he says (17:1): "Let us take pattern by those who went about in sheepskins and goatskins heralding the Messiah's coming; that is to say, Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel among the prophets, and other famous names besides."

Are we to see John the Baptist buried in that last phrase? He hardly deserves such passing anonymity. Besides, Clement goes on to detail examples of those "famous names" and they are all from the Old Testament. Hebrews 11 also fails to include John in its enumeration of heroes of the faith who suffered, faced jeers and scourgings, stoning and prison and even death. (For that matter, as we shall see, it also fails to include Jesus.)

There was a common Jewish belief that the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by the appearance of the ancient prophet Elijah, to herald his advent. If 1st century Christian preachers were at all concerned with justifying their claim that Jesus had been the Messiah, John the Baptist would have been invaluable as an Elijah-type figure to fulfill this expectation.

¶ 12. -Hebrews 9:19-20

¹⁹*For when, as the Law directed, Moses had recited all the commandments to the people, he took the blood of the calves, with water, scarlet wool, and marjoram, and sprinkled the law-book itself and all the people,* ²⁰*saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you." [NEB]*

At the core of this writer's theology lies the new covenant established by Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice which takes place in heaven. (See Supplementary Article No. 9: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews.) His exegetical technique revolves around the drawing of parallels between the community's ritual and theology and the embodiment or prototype of these things in the scriptures. And yet the prime scriptural event which had established the old covenant, the blood sacrifice of animals conducted by Moses and the words spoken over this ritual (Exodus 24:8), is presented without the slightest glance toward Jesus' own establishment of the new covenant by the words he spoke over the bread and wine at the Last Supper.

The parallel between the old and the new, the very striking similarity between the words spoken by Moses in Exodus and the words spoken by Jesus at the sacramental meal which established the perpetual celebration of his sacrifice, should have been so compelling that the author could not possibly have avoided calling attention to it. The only conclusion to draw is that he knew of no such event, and no such words spoken by Jesus at a Last Supper. (The mythical scene in 1 Cor. 11:23f which Paul presents to his congregation as a product of personal revelation—see the section "Learning of a Sacred Meal" in Supplementary Article No 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel—has apparently not yet reached the community of the Epistle to the Hebrews.)

[We might point out that the turn of the 2nd century Christian document known as the Didache (Teaching) also shows a stunning silence on Jesus' establishment of the Eucharist. In chapter 9, community prayers attached to a thanksgiving meal are quoted, and they contain no sacramental element whatever. The bread and the wine in this communal meal in no way signify Jesus' death. Jesus did not institute this ceremony. It is attached to no incident in his life, certainly not the eve of his sacrifice. Jesus' role in the theology of this community seems to be nothing more than a kind of (spiritual) conduit from God, as indicated by this passage, quoting a verse from the prayers:

"At the Eucharist, offer the eucharistic prayer in this way. Begin with the chalice: 'We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the holy vine of thy servant David, which thou has made known to us through thy servant (or child) Jesus.'" In fact, the Didache in its entirety is notably silent on any aspect of Jesus' life and death.]

¶ 13 - Hebrews 12:15-17

¹⁵*See to it that there is no one among you who forfeits the grace of God, no bitter, noxious weed to poison the whole,* ¹⁶*no immoral person, no one worldly-minded like Esau. He sold his birthright for a single meal,* ¹⁷*and you know that although he wanted afterwards to claim the blessing, he was rejected. [NEB]*

Dante in his Inferno places Judas in the pit of Hell, locked in ice, gnawed on by Satan. The arch-betrayer who planted his deceitful kiss on Jesus' cheek and helped deliver him to death was to become a symbol in Christian minds of all falsehearted and disbelieving Jewry. Judas inaugurated the Jew as demon, and an entire race suffered fiercely for it over two millennia. Yet

before he appears to fill his treacherous role in Mark's Passion story, no ghost of Judas haunts the Christian landscape. He is notably missing from the above passage in Hebrews, where the selling of the Lord himself for 30 pieces of silver by a man embittered, jealous and deceitful, would surely have been a more apt symbol of the bitter, poisonous weed that arises unchecked within the community of the holy.

Hebrews is usually dated either just before or just after the Jewish War. It is in this period (60-80) that scholars usually place the writing of Mark, where Judas first surfaces. Considering Hebrews' apparent ignorance of such a figure, either Mark should be dated later, or else the first Gospel contains ideas which were not widely known among Christian communities of the time. Or both.

We might note that the writer of 1 Clement also deals with the theme of jealousy, but to his list of Old Testament figures who suffered at the hands of jealous men, he fails to add Jesus himself, betrayed by the perfidious apostle in his own company.

¶ 14. - Romans 13:3-4

Rulers hold no terrors to those who do right. . . If you wish not to fear the authorities, then do what is good and you will have their approval, for they are God's agents working for your good. [NIV/NEB]

Can Paul possibly have any sense of Jesus' historical trial and crucifixion and still express such sentiments? Pilate, whether he believed in Jesus' innocence or not, delivered this righteous man to scourging and unjust execution. If the story of such a fate suffered by Jesus of Nazareth were present in every Christian's mind, Paul's praise of the authorities, whether Jewish or Roman, as God's agents for the good of all, and from which the innocent have nothing to fear, would ring hollow indeed.

In fact, all the early writers lack the essential atmosphere of the Gospel presentation of Jesus' death: that this was the unjust execution of an innocent man, beset by betrayal and false accusations and a pitiless establishment. Instead, Paul in Romans 8:32 extols the magnanimity of God who "did not spare his own Son but surrendered him for us all," and for the writer of Ephesians (5:2), it is Christ himself who in love "gave himself up on your behalf as an offering and a sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God." This seems far from the dread Golgotha of the Gospels and its scene of deicide. (See Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus? for a full discussion of the nature and location of the spiritual Christ's redemptive 'crucifixion'.)

¶ 15. - 1 John 4:1-3

¹Dear friends, do not believe every spirit [i.e., prophetic utterance, spoken under the influence of God's Spirit], but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. . . [NIV]

This passage tells us that in early Christian preaching, the test which determined whether a Christian apostle was speaking the truth related to the spirit which God had sent him. This epistle

was written probably in the last decade of the 1st century. One would expect that by this time Christians possessed a body of material regarded as proceeding from Jesus himself, transmitted to them over the decades through a chain of authorized apostles and community leaders, a process of transmission through "apostolic tradition." Yet such an idea is nowhere to be found in any of the epistles (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4). We do not encounter even the barest concept of a teaching passed on between generations, arising out of an apostolic past attached ultimately to Jesus. Instead, doctrine comes directly through revelation from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, though some "spirits" may come from the devil.

In the above passage, the test of the true spirit is whether the message being preached corresponds to the writer's own position, which *he* has arrived at through the spirit: the belief that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Though no time or circumstances are offered, such a rivalry between different "spirits" shows that at the end of the century, the doctrine that the heavenly Christ had been on earth (something known through the Holy Spirit, or revelation) was not being accepted by every Christian. (See my Supplementary Article No 2: A Solution to the First Epistle of John, for a full discussion of the meaning of this passage.)

We might compare the Didache, chapter 11, which contains a lengthy discussion about how to judge the legitimacy of wandering apostles, both in their teaching and their charismatic activities. No part of this judgment is based upon any links with apostolic tradition; there is no question of tracing authority or correctness back to Jesus, or to a group of apostles who had known and followed him on earth.

¶ 16. - 1 Corinthians 10:11

... For upon us the fulfilment of the ages has come. [NEB]

One of the driving forces of the Christian movement was the expectation that the end of the world and the arrival of Christ to establish God's Kingdom was at hand, part of a longstanding Jewish anticipation of the Day of the Lord.

The conception and pattern of history was simple. The period stretching back through history was the "old age," an age of sin and evil and darkness, when God had permitted Satan to rule, when the righteous were persecuted and divine justice was delayed. The "new age" would begin with the arrival of some heavenly figure or messianic agent of God, who would direct the overthrow of Israel's enemies and the forces of evil generally. The highlight of all this would be a day of judgment when the righteous would be exalted and the sinner and oppressor consigned to punishment. The pattern of salvation history, stretching in a line from past through future, fell into two sections: the old age and the new. Scholars refer to this pattern as "two-age dualism."

In the orthodox picture of Christian origins, however, a radically new dimension has been added to the pattern. The Messiah had come, but not the Kingdom with him. Christ had died and been resurrected, but still the new age had not dawned. That was to be delayed until his return, this time in glory and as judge at the Parousia. Between the two comings of Christ, as brief a period as that might be, the gospel message had to be carried to as many as possible and the world had to be made ready.

If this was indeed the scenario faced by the first couple of generations of Christian preachers and believers, we would expect to find two things. First, a significant recasting of the two-age pattern. The coming of Jesus would have to be seen as a pivotal point in the ongoing scheme of

redemption history. After all, the Son of God had come to earth; his life had included the act of salvation itself, the atoning death and divine resurrection which guaranteed the resurrection of Christians at the Parousia. The "interregnum," that period between the life of Christ and his second coming, would have to be seen as a separate period of its own, during which forces were operating which had previously been absent, when precedents set by Jesus awaited their final fulfilment.

"Upon us the fulfilment of the ages has come!" Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 10:11, pointing to the Parousia which he believes is very near. Does he see no "fulfilment" in the recent past in Jesus? Preceding this comment has been Paul's enumeration of symbolic events in Israelite history at the time of the Exodus. Those events looked toward the future, "for our benefit." But that future is cast entirely in terms of believers like Paul, who await the imminent End. Paul, here and elsewhere, has not the smallest glance for an intervening event in the earthly life and work of Christ. To the extent that Paul has a past "pivot point" at all (as will be seen in Romans 8:22-3), it is the time of revelation, the "giving of the spirit," sometimes the sending of the spirit of the Son. The turning point of salvation history was the arrival of faith when God revealed Christ and people responded to the carriers of the revelation—most importantly, Paul himself. When Paul occasionally looks backward, it is to the unveiling of the mystery about Christ, the visions and inspirations, the "seeing" of the Christ by so many apostles, including himself (1 Cor. 15:3-8). These are the events he regards as inaugurating the final period of the old age leading to the new.

Neither here, nor in any of the other passages like it, does Paul address what should have been the key question: Why did the actual coming of the Messiah not in itself produce the turn of the ages? For this had been the expectation of centuries. No one could have anticipated that the arrival of the Messiah would *not* be accompanied by the establishment of the Kingdom. We would expect to find some kind of apologetic industry arising within the Christian movement to explain this unexpected and disappointing turn of events. Yet every single epistle writer is silent on such a thing.

[There have been many analyses of the Christian conception of time which purport to see the early Christian view according to a recasting of the two-age pattern. A famous and influential one is Oscar Cullmann's *Christ and Time*, 1955. Cullmann professes to see a new, three-stage conception in Paul: first, primal history (going back to the myths of the patriarchs); second, the historical event of Jesus of Nazareth, the pivot through which all redemptive history is now seen to pass; and third, the future eschatological (end-time) myth and expectation. Cullmann sees in Paul an orientation that is no longer eschatological (looking to the future); rather it is "toward He (sic) who has already come."

Unfortunately, Cullmann's picture is a figment of his imagination, a product of his preconceptions which he will impose on Paul no matter what Paul says. No. 2 in our list, Romans 16:25-27, and No. 7, Titus 1:3 (along with others to come), speak of the long-hidden divine mysteries that God has revealed in the present time to apostles and prophets. There was certainly no "second stage" there, occupied by the recent Jesus of Nazareth and his redemptive life, no pivot point of salvation history which now lies in the past. Paul's orientation is very much toward the future, as the present passage and others to come will show (including Romans 8:19f and 13:11-12).]

¶ 17. - 1 Corinthians 1:7-8

There is no gift you lack, while you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you till the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. [RSV]

This passage is representative of many in the epistles which speak of the anticipated coming of Christ (the Parousia). In many cases, as here, the verb employed is a revelation word. That is, the writer speaks of the "revealing" of the Christ (cf. 1 Peter 1:7 & 13, 2 Thess. 1:7). This is a strange way of putting it, if Jesus had just lived a full life on earth within living memory.

Another common mode of expression is the use of the verb "to come" (*erchomai*). Greek has no specific word for "return" in the sense of coming back to a place one has visited or been at before. The word *erchomai* is a basic verb of motion and can mean to come, or to go, or to pass; a specific meaning, which can include "return," is conveyed by adjuncts or the context. Other passages convey the idea of Christ's coming by using words like "the appearance of" (e.g., 1 Tim. 6:14). With one possible exception (Hebrews 9:28, which will be touched on in connection with Hebrews 10:37 and dealt with fully in the Appendix), nowhere does any writer attempt to convey the sense of "return." For example, the simple word *palin*, "again," employed with *erchomai*, could have served this purpose, yet no one ever uses it. (Cf. also Phil. 1:6 and 3:20, Titus 2:13.)

Such reticence is in sharp contrast to New Testament scholars who, when translating or interpreting such terms as "come" or "appearance" in the epistles, routinely use the word "return" or the phrase "second coming." But if readers can free themselves from the Gospel background, they will find that all these references convey the distinct impression that this will be the first and only coming to earth, that this expectation, this longing to see Christ, has in no way been previously fulfilled.

We keep wanting these writers to clarify, to acknowledge, that Jesus had already come before, that he had begun when on earth the work he would complete at the Parousia; that people had formerly witnessed their deliverance in the event of his death and resurrection; that he had been "revealed" to the sight of all in his incarnated life as Jesus of Nazareth. But never an echo of such ideas do we hear in the background of these passages.

[Note: A related but separate issue is whether the "coming" on the Day of the Lord is envisioned as the coming of Christ himself (as it is here), or only the older Jewish idea of the coming of God. This will be discussed in connection with James 5:7.]

¶ 18. - Romans 10:9

(This is the word of faith that we preach:) That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus [homologeseis . . . kurion Iesoun], and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. [KJ]

Here is Paul's basic declaration of faith, which he preaches in his missionary work, and I will use it to highlight one of the fundamental silences to be found in all the New Testament epistles. The above translation is from the King James version, and reflects the literal Greek, unlike most modern translations which render the key phrase: "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord." (The NASB gets close with its "If you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord," its italicized "as" representing a supplied word that is not in the original.)

For all the discussion about faith which he indulges in throughout his letters, Paul never itemizes the one element of faith we would expect, the one that must come at the start. Indeed, even in modern Christian preaching to the outside world, we encounter it constantly: that Jesus of Nazareth, a human being who lived at a given point in the past and did certain things, was in fact the Son of God and Messiah. In all the New Testament epistles, no one is ever enjoined to believe that an historical man was anything. Paul's faith declarations are a belief *in* something. One believes that such a being exists, that he possesses certain powers and heavenly status, that he is God's instrument of salvation. But never that a recent human being was such-and-such.

When read straightforwardly (as the KJ does), the above declaration says: "if you confess the Lord Christ," which is a statement that the believer acknowledges Christ's existence and his power. If Paul were speaking of a recent historical man, that man would be the starting point of his thinking, and he would frame his faith declarations in terms of what that man was, his nature, identity and role. Instead, here as everywhere else, his starting point is the divine Son in heaven, the object of God's revealed gospel. Claims are made about this spiritual figure, all of it based on scripture.

Paul places such a declaration entirely in the realm of present faith, not history. Even if we assume the common modern translation of "if you confess Jesus is Lord," we note the present tense and the fact that the statement is a confession about a given heavenly figure. Paul acknowledges that "Jesus is the Lord of us," which has the effect of an address directly to the divinity: "You are Lord."

¶ 19. - James 5:15

The Gospels tell us how the sick pressed to touch the hem of Jesus' garment; how they stood in the byways and called out to him as he passed, crying for deliverance from their afflictions. Jesus had shown mercy to them all, even if those today who wish to bring the Gospel accounts down to earth suggest that many of these healings were psychological. How could the tradition have grown so strong that Jesus had performed such healings if he had not in fact brought relief to many sick and disordered people in the course of his ministry?

Yet we would never know it from James 5:15:

Is one of you ill? . . . ¹⁵The prayer offered in faith will save the sick man, the Lord [here there is no doubt the writer means God] will raise him from his bed, and any sins he may have committed will be forgiven. [NEB]

It is inconceivable that the writer would not have appealed to the fact that Jesus himself had done these very things, had he possessed any such traditions. Mark 2:1-12 presents us with a miracle scene in which Jesus does both. To the paralytic he says: "Take up thy bed and walk," and at the same time he pronounces the man's sins forgiven. The writer of James has clearly never heard of it.

Nor has he who sent the letter known as 1 Clement, from Rome to Corinth, at the very end of the first century. In chapter 59, "Clement" delivers a long prayer to God which must have been in the liturgy of the church at Rome. Here is one part of it:

"Grant us, O Lord, we beseech thee, thy help and protection. Do thou deliver the afflicted, pity the lowly, raise the fallen, reveal thyself to the needy, heal the sick, and

bring home thy wandering people. Feed thou the hungry, ransom the captive, support the weak, comfort the faint-hearted."

The Gospels tell us that Jesus did these very things, from healing the sick to feeding the hungry. In God's own name, as he walked the sands of Galilee and Judea, he pitied, he supported, he comforted, he revealed God. The reader should be left dumbfounded at the silence of Clement and his community about any such activities.

¶ 20. - Philippians 3:10

All I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings . . . [NEB]

The final silence in our "Top 20" is one that resonates throughout the entire record of early Christian correspondence, but we can focus on it through one passage in Paul. This striking and pervasive silence, perhaps the most telling of them all, can be summed up in one question: Where are the holy places?

In all the Christian writers of the 1st century, in all the devotion they display about Christ and the new faith, not one of them ever expresses the slightest desire to see the birthplace of Jesus, to visit Nazareth his home town, the sites of his preaching, the upper room where he held his Last Supper, the hill on which he was crucified, or the tomb where he was buried and rose from the dead. Not only is there no evidence that anyone showed an interest in such places, they go completely unmentioned. The words Bethlehem, Nazareth and Galilee never appear in the epistles, and the word Jerusalem is never used in connection with Jesus. Most astonishing of all, there is not a hint of pilgrimage to Calvary itself, where humanity's salvation was consummated. How could such a place not have become the center of Christian devotion, how could it not have been turned into a shrine? Each year at Passover we would expect to find Christians observing their own celebration on the hill outside Jerusalem, performing a rite every Easter Sunday at the site of the nearby tomb. Christian sermonizing and theological meditation could hardly fail to be built around the *places* of salvation, not just the abstract events.

Do Christians avoid frequenting such places out of fear? Acts, possibly preserving a kernel of historical reality, portrays the Apostles as preaching fearlessly in the Temple in the earliest days, despite arrest and persecution, and the persecution has in any case been much exaggerated for the early decades. Even such a threat, however, should not and would not have prevented clandestine visits by Christians, and there were many other places of Jesus' career whose visitation would have involved no danger. And, of course, there would have been no danger in *mentioning* them in their correspondence.

Even Paul seems immune to the lure of such places. He can speak, as in Philippians, of wanting to know Christ, to know the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings. And yet, does he rush to the hill of Calvary upon his conversion, to experience those sufferings the more vividly, to throw himself upon the sacred ground that bore the blood of his slain Lord? Does he stand before the empty tomb, the better to bring home to himself the power of Jesus' resurrection, the better to feel the conviction that his own resurrection is guaranteed? This is a man whose letters reveal someone full of insecurities and self-doubts, possessed by his own demons, highly emotional, a man driven to preach else he would go mad, as he tells us in 1 Corinthians 9:16. Would he not have derived great consolation from visiting the Gethsemane garden, where Jesus is reported to have passed through similar horrors and self-doubts? Would his sacramental convictions about the Lord's Supper, which he is anxious to impart to the

Corinthians (11:23f), not have been heightened by a visit to the upper room in Jerusalem, to absorb the ambience of that hallowed place and occasion?

Once again, such considerations render unacceptable the standard rationalization that Paul was uninterested in the earthly life of Jesus. Moreover, when Paul undertakes to carry his mission to the gentiles, surely he would want—and need—to go armed with the data of Jesus' life, with memories of the places Jesus had frequented, ready to answer the inevitable questions his new audiences would ask in their eagerness to hear all the details about the man who was the Son of God and Savior of the world. Instead, what does he do? By his own account in Galatians, he waits three years following his conversion before making a short visit to Jerusalem, "to get to know Cephas. I stayed with him for fifteen days, without seeing any of the other apostles except James, the brother of the lord." Nor was he to return there for another fourteen years. Did Paul learn all the data of Jesus' life on that one occasion? Did he visit the holy places? Not having felt the urge to do so for three years, his silence on such things is perhaps not surprising. But if he did, can we believe he would not have shared these experiences—and they would have been intensely emotional ones—with his readers? If not here, then at least at *some* point in his many letters?

But it is not only the places of Jesus' life and death. What about the relics? Jesus' clothes, the things he used in his everyday life, the things he touched? Can we believe that such items would not have remained behind, to be collected, clamored for, to be seen and touched by the faithful themselves? Would not an apostle like Paul be anxious to carry such a memento of the man he preached? Would not a rivalry develop between apostles, between Christian communities (as it did later), to gain such mementos and relics for worship and as status symbols? Did not one single cup survive from the Last Supper—one that would be claimed to have touched Jesus' own lips? Was there not a single nail with Jesus' flesh on it, not one thorn from the bloody crown, not the centurion's spear, not a piece of cloth from his garments gambled over by the soldiers at the foot of the cross—not, in fact, a host of relics claimed to be these very things, such as we find all through the Middle Ages?

Why is it only in the 4th century that pieces of "the true cross" begin to surface? Why is it left to Constantine to set up the first shrine on the supposed mount of Jesus' death, and to begin the mania for pilgrimage to the holy sites that has persisted to this day? Why would someone in the first 100 years of the movement not similarly seek to walk on the same ground that the Son of God himself had so recently walked on? The total absence of such things in the first hundred years of Christian correspondence is perhaps the single strongest argument for regarding the entire Gospel account of Jesus' life and death as nothing but literary fabrication.

[It is often claimed, in relation not only to this silence but to a host of others, that the epistles, being "occasional" writings, simply don't happen to contain any "occasion" for mentioning such things. Well, the object of the present exercise is to demonstrate that this is not the case. But there is a larger rejoinder to such a rationalization. Had these things existed in the early Christian world, they would have been impressed on the minds of the epistle writers, commending themselves for mention; such writers would have *made* occasion for working them into their letters. Indeed, they could not have prevented themselves from doing so.

If one analyzes the epistles, one finds a consistency in the motifs employed, the modes of expression used. To a great extent these are drawn from the Hebrew Bible; and they reflect the atmosphere of revelation and inspiration which characterized the 1st century. But if the words and deeds, the places and relics of Jesus' recent life had been in the air, remembered and discussed and visited and touched, these are the things around which we would find an

inevitable orientation of thought and expression. Such a phenomenon would have been unavoidable if everything had begun with a response to an historical man whose life and death so impressed his followers and those who were told of him. A focus on the man himself, and the physical trail of him, would pervade the record. But for these writers to show not the smallest sign that any of Jesus' words, deeds, places and relics were present in their thoughts when they took pen to paper, is a situation so bizarre, so unlikely, that we are obliged to look for another explanation. The one which most commends itself is that they knew of no such things and no such person.

Perhaps by the time we have gone through the entire corpus of New Testament epistles, and the picture of the extent and arresting nature of the silence is complete, you the reader may come to the same conclusion as well.]

Romans

Following on the "Top 20" silences, we will return now to the very head of the epistolary corpus and the beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans. The opening verses of this epistle could well be ranked next in line, for they contain an important and telling insight into the source of Christian ideas about God's Son, and an explanation for those 'human' sounding features occasionally given to him.

¶ 21. - Romans 1:1-4

¹Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle [or, apostle by God's call: NEB], set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised [or, announced: NEB] beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the gospel concerning his Son . . . [RSV]

The way Paul presents it, the scriptures prophesied the *gospel* of the Son which Paul carries, not the life or person of Jesus himself. This is an odd way of putting things, and yet it is extremely revealing, for it implies, once again, that between God's foretelling of the gospel in the prophetic books, and the revelation of that gospel to Paul and others, no life of Jesus intervened. Instead, scripture, newly interpreted, tells of the Son whose existence and work has been previously unknown, and who operates in the higher spiritual realm. This will be supported by the later part of this passage (below).

Two additional silences here: the "gospel" is a product sent from God. No role for a preaching Jesus, as originator of the gospel about himself, is hinted at. This, and the "call" which in other places is clearly identified as being a call by God and not Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 1:1), not only supports the silence on any historical Jesus as the source of the Christian gospel, it negates Acts' legend of a direct call to Paul from the exalted Christ in a vision on the road to Damascus.

. . . who was descended from the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness [or, the Holy Spirit: NEB] by his resurrection from the dead. [RSV]

As the sentence is constructed, Paul is saying that his information about Jesus being "of the seed of David" comes from the gospel imbedded in scripture, and not from any historical record or tradition. The sacred writings contained many prophecies that the Christ/Messiah would be of David's line, and Paul would have had to find a way to apply them to his heavenly Son. When one considers that the second element of this statement, Christ being declared Son of God in power "according to the Spirit," was almost certainly derived from Psalm 2:7-8 and refers to a perceived heavenly event, one is led to take both these 'gospel' elements as referring to information known about the Christ *from scripture*, and as referring to spiritual-world features. For an explanation of the term "according to the flesh" in such a context and how a spiritual Christ could be perceived as related to David, as well as for a fuller discussion of this entire passage, see Section II of Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ As "Man". This passage will also be extensively discussed in the Appendix.

¶ 22. - Romans 1:16-17

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith . . . ¹⁷because here is revealed God's way of righting wrong . . . [NEB]

Once again, Paul attributes the gospel to God, and its power to God. Even the gift of righteousness bestowed on the believer is assigned to God. There seems to be no impingement on Paul's consciousness of a recent historical Jesus and his role in producing and embodying the gospel and its effects.

¶ — Romans 1:19-20 - See "Top 20" #1

¶ 23. - Romans 3:21-25

²¹But now, quite independently of law [i.e., the Jewish scriptural Law], God's justice has been manifested, borne witness to by the Law and the Prophets [i.e., the Mosaic and prophetic books of scripture]. ²²It is God's way of righting wrong, effective through faith in Christ for all who have such faith . . . [NEB, ED]

An involved but very revealing passage which we'll look at in two parts, containing important silences. Following this passage, in verse 26, "God's justice" is specified as something which has been revealed (the verb *phaneroo*) "at the present time." Paul is saying that the present period is one of revelation, not the arrival of Jesus on earth and his saving acts. And rather than Jesus "bearing witness" or testifying to God's justice, it is scripture that does so, a direct statement that this is where Paul and others have learned of it, not through the person and preaching of a human Jesus in recent history. Once again, the agency is God, not Jesus. The means is through faith: faith in the spiritual Christ, a newly-revealed figure.

. . . ²⁴all are justified by God's free grace alone, through his act of redemption in [the person of: NEB] Christ Jesus. ²⁵For God set him forth [proetheto] as a means of expiating sin through faith in his blood [i.e., in his sacrificial death].

Here the focus remains on God as the performer of saving actions in the present time. It is God who does the act of redeeming, not Jesus. The NEB's words "in the person of" are not in the Greek, but reflect a desire to compensate for Paul's failure to make Jesus the direct agent of redemption. Christ is brought in only as God's *instrument* of that redemption, the object of a required faith, and a redemption effected through further faith in his sacrificial death. All this language is compatible with Christ being an entirely spiritual figure who has now been revealed, and whose sacrifice took place in the spirit realm. (And anyone who doubts that "blood" could be spiritual and be shed in the upper heavenly world need only read Hebrews 8 - 9.)

This revelation of Christ—not his presence on earth—is supported by the verb *protithemi*, one of whose meanings is "to set forth publicly" in the sense of "disclose to general knowledge." God is revealing Christ and what he has done, through scripture, to the likes of Paul, and has revealed the benefits to be drawn from Christ's redemptive sacrifice. Note the exclusive pervasiveness of the idea of "faith" in regard to Jesus, faith in what scripture—and Paul—have revealed. There is nothing of history here.

[For A Discussion Of That Ubiquitous Pauline Phrase "In—Or Through—Christ," Signifying A Christ Who Is An Agency Of Salvation And A Spiritual Medium Through Which God Reveals Himself And Does His Work In The World, See Part Two Of The Main Articles. See Also The Optional Text Under 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (#55).]

¶ 24. - Romans 6:17

But God be thanked, you, who once were slaves of sin, have yielded whole-hearted obedience to the pattern of teaching which was handed on to you . . . [NEB]

Now, if this teaching that was handed on to the believer was in fact wholly or in part the product of Jesus, preached while he was on earth, why wouldn't Paul simply say so? Regardless of whether the believer knew where it came from, the natural thought and expression would surely have been: "the pattern of teaching given to us by Christ Jesus," or some such words. [Cf. 1 Timothy 6:3 - see Appendix: 1 Timothy 6:13 / (and 6:3).]

¶ 25. - Romans 8:19-23

¹⁹For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons [i.e., the faithful believers] to be revealed [i.e., revealed for all the world to see] . . . [NEB]

Early Christianity, along with most Jews, believed that the end, or transformation, of the world was near. As we saw in "Top 20" #16 (1 Cor. 10:11), this "two-age dualism" envisioned the present age of world history as about to change into the new age of God's Kingdom, usually under apocalyptic circumstances. In this and other passages, we can see that Paul's outlook is focused on what is yet to come, not on what has just happened. Here, his expectation is in terms of the imminent revelation of the Spirit of God through believers; none of it is in relation to recent historical events in the person of a Jesus of Nazareth.

. . . ²¹the universe itself will be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God. . . .

If Jesus' recent act in history had effected this, Paul's expression should have been pulled into the past tense, such as: "creation *has been* freed from . . ."

. . . ²²Up to the present, the whole universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. . . .

The whole universe is groaning, waiting. Where is the sense of any past fulfilment in the life and career of Jesus? Were some of the universe's pains not assuaged by his coming? Indeed, the universe is laboring to give birth, a birth not yet achieved. Paul seems to relegate Jesus' life to some pre-natal kick. "Up to the present," says Paul, has the universe labored, leaving no room for what should have been regarded as the pivot point of salvation history, the releasing moment of the world's long labor: Christ's very life and salvific act on Calvary. Paul gives no hint of such a thing.

One might also wonder why it did not occur to Paul to regard certain Gospel events as part of the 'groaning of the universe,' namely the earthquake at Jesus' crucifixion recorded in Matthew, or the three hours of darkness covering the earth recorded by all the Synoptics. Notably missing as well are Jesus' miracles, which were regarded by later Christians as part of the 'signs' leading up to the change of the ages. Paul, neither here nor anywhere else, has a word to say about Jesus' Gospel miracles, not even as auguring the approach of the new age.

. . . ²³*Not only so, but even we, to whom the Spirit is given as firstfruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us his sons and set our whole body free.*

Key silences here. When Paul does refer to present or immediately past events, the preparatory stage to this awaited freedom for the universe, what does he have in mind? Only the "giving of the Spirit," the act of God in revealing the gospel, which has enlisted men like Paul to preach Christ and herald the Kingdom. The recent career of Jesus himself, which at the very least should have been regarded as the 'first installment' of God's actions in the present period, is nowhere in sight.

"We wait for God to make us his sons." How can Paul say he is waiting for God to do this? Had he not already done so, and much more, through the incarnation? Indeed, why would Paul not express the idea that it was Jesus himself and his deeds on earth which had set people free and made them sons of God? How can he not insert the recent life of Jesus of Nazareth into the picture of the unfolding of salvation history? The question of "need," or the readers' existing knowledge of such a thing, has nothing to do with it. Paul's vivid description of the present age cries out for the natural, unavoidable inclusion of the recent life of Jesus, and we do not get it. If, on the other hand, the sacrificial death of the spiritual Son of God was a timeless, mythical event which took place in the upper spiritual world, then it was not part of the present age that is about to pass away; it did not form part of the picture Paul is creating. Christ impinges on the present age only in God's revelation of him, in the sending of the spirit of this Son regarded as an intermediary (cf. Galatians 4:6), in the taking effect of the benefits of redemption through Christ in this new age of faith.

¶ 26. - Romans 8:24-25

²⁴*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all; for who hopes for what he already sees?* ²⁵*But if we hope for something we do not see, we await it with patience. [NIV/RSV]*

Following on the previous passage, Paul again implies that the characteristic of the present age is one of faith, faith in something that will happen in the future. How could he not envision that the incarnation of the Son, witnessed by so many (even if not by himself personally), constituted a "seeing" of salvation and the events which brought this about? In fact, the witness to Jesus' physical resurrection, as recorded by all the post-Markan evangelists, was a "seeing" of the very thing Paul and his readers hope for: the physical resurrection of the dead. As was Jesus' miraculous reviving of more than one Lazarus, in full public "seeing"! This passage illustrates the void in Paul's mind about any fulfilment, or even witnessing, of God's saving plan for humanity in the historical figure and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth.

¶ 27. - Romans 8:26

For we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. [RSV]

Could Paul have been ignorant of the Lord's Prayer, taught to his disciples by Jesus? If not even this element of Jesus' preaching reached Paul by oral transmission, or if Paul made not even this degree of effort to learn what Jesus had said, how can he claim to be preaching this man, and

how could he possibly satisfy the needs and demands of his listeners to know at least *something* about Jesus' own teachings? Paul simply could not ignore such basic data of Jesus' ministry, and thus the "explanation" offered by those who say he had no interest in Jesus' life cannot stand up to scrutiny. (See my book review of Robert Funk's *Honest to Jesus* for extensive discussion along these lines.)

Should not Paul have regarded the ministering Jesus as having "interceded" with God on humanity's behalf, a claim which Jesus himself makes more than once in the Gospels?

¶ 28. - Romans 10:3-4

A profound silence on an historical Jesus reigns throughout chapters 10 and 11 of the epistle to the Romans, one that defies acceptable explanation. Paul is addressing the question of whether the Jews can expect an ultimate salvation from God, and it hinges on their faith in Christ. He begins chapter 10 this way:

³For they [the Jews] ignore God's way of righteousness, and try to set up their own, and therefore they have not submitted themselves to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ ends the law and brings righteousness for everyone who has faith. [NEB]

Where is the sense of Jesus' historical ministry? God is the primary agency here, with Christ a present force under his direction, so Paul casts Christ's activities in the present tense. Rather than "Christ brought righteousness" in recent history, it is *now*, through God's revelation and the preaching of Paul, that he does so. Throughout these passages, in all the discussion about the Jews' failure to believe and their misguided attempts at righteousness, there is a resounding silence about their failure to heed the person and message of Jesus himself, during his recent incarnation on earth. This will be continued in greater detail in the following two items (29 and 30).

¶ — Romans 10:9 - See "Top 20" #18

¶ 29. - Romans 10:13-21

Continuing with his consideration of the Jews' prospects for salvation through faith in Christ, Paul now addresses the question of what opportunities they have had to know Christ, and how they have responded to those opportunities. He asks a series of questions, prefaced by a quote from Joel (2:32 LXX) in which "Lord," unlike the original meaning, is taken to refer to Jesus the Messiah:

¹³For [scripture says] "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

¹⁴But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without a preacher?

¹⁵And how can men preach unless they are sent [out to preach]?

As it is written: "How beautiful the feet of those who preach good news!" . . . [RSV]

As Paul presents it in these verses, the Jews' opportunity to know Christ is limited to hearing Christ preached by men like Paul, sent out as apostles on their beautiful feet (a quote from Isaiah 52:7). There is not a hint here of a very important opportunity which the Jews—at least those of Galilee and Judea a generation earlier—had enjoyed, namely the seeing and hearing of Christ himself, preaching in his own person. In highlighting the guilt of the Jews in not believing in Christ, would Paul have totally ignored their dramatic rejection of the incarnated Son on earth? He goes on:

¹⁶But not all have responded to the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of [i.e., about] Christ. ¹⁸But I ask, can it be that they [the Jews] never heard it? Of course they did: "Their voice went out to all the world, and their words to the ends of the inhabited earth." . . . [NEB, ED]

From this, too, it is clear that Paul is speaking solely of the preaching of commissioned apostles like himself. This cannot include Jesus. The genitive "of Christ" in verse 17 is an objective genitive, Christ being the object of the preaching. In Verse 18, Paul gives himself an opening to deliver the strongest answer, the most culpable reason for the Jews' guilt and possible loss of salvation: they had heard the message from the lips of the Lord himself and had rejected it. But Paul fails to follow that opening. How could he not highlight his countrymen's spurning of the Son of God in the flesh? Instead, all he refers to are those apostles like himself who have "preached to the ends of the earth" (a bit of hyperbole on his part). Paul, throughout this entire passage, is not only silent on, he has made no room for an historical, preaching Jesus.

Paul goes on to quote three more passages from scripture:

¹⁹Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." ²⁰Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." ²¹But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." [RSV]

Here Paul passes up the obvious contrast between Jew and gentile. In the first two quotations he highlights the shame of the Jews vs. the merit of the gentiles, but he fails to make the point that whereas the Jews had rejected the message even though delivered by Jesus himself, the gentiles had accepted it second-hand. And in Paul's final quote, the concept of Jesus' own hands, stretched out to his people during his ministry on earth, apparently did not occur to him.

[C. K. Barrett (*Epistle to the Romans*, P.189) Is One Scholar Who Seems Perturbed By The Silence In Romans 10, For He Tries By A Dubious Device To Work Jesus Into The Picture. In The Second Of Paul's Four Questions Quoted Above (V.14-15), The Phrase In Greek "*hou ouk ekousan*" Is Almost Universally Translated: "Of Whom They Have Not Heard." Bauer's Lexicon Gives This Meaning, But Occasionally Commentators (Sanday, Cranfield) Will Maintain That *akouo* With The Genitive Means "To Hear Someone," That Is, Directly. The "Unusual" Meaning "To Hear of" Is Permitted, Some Say, Only In Poetry. Well, Perhaps We Might Hold That Paul Is Very Close To Poetry In These Rhythmical, Balanced Questions, All Of Which Are Parallel In Structure And Begin With The Same Word.

At Any Rate, Barrett Seizes On This View To Stipulate That The "*hou*" In The Second Question Should Be Translated "Whom (Not of whom) They Have Not Heard," For, He Says, "Christ Must Be Heard Either In His Own Person, Or In The Person Of His

Preachers." Apart From Wanting It Both Ways, Barrett Fails To Take Into Account That Forcing Jesus Into The Mix Here Destroys Paul's Finely-Created Chain, A Chain Which Focuses Entirely On The Response To The Apostolic Message. This Is Why Even Those Who Maintain That The Grammatical Meaning Is To "Hear Him" (Not of Him) Nevertheless Take Paul's Idea As Identifying The Voice Of Christ With That Of The Preachers. As Cranfield Puts It (International Critical Commentary, *Romans*, P.534), Paul's Thought Is "Of Their Hearing Christ Speaking In The Message Of The Preachers." Thus, Jesus Is Speaking To The Jews Only By Proxy. This Still Leaves Unaddressed The Larger Question Of Why Paul Fails To Make A Specific Reference To Jesus' Own Ministry, But At Least Such An Interpretation Conforms To The Passage's Integrity As Paul Presents It. Barrett's Does Not. When He Wraps Up His Comment On This Chapter By Saying: "Through The Son, Both In His Incarnate Person And By Means Of His Apostles, God Has Pleaded With Israel, And Met With Nothing But Rebuffs," Barrett Is Not Only Showing Us What We Should Rightly Expect To Find There, He Is Letting What He Cannot Believe Is Missing Override What Is Clearly Not There In Paul's Words. Besides, To Maintain That Paul, In His Picture Of The Unresponse Of The Jews, Would Choose To Limit Jesus' Key Role In That Picture To An Ambiguous Two-Letter (In The Greek) Relative Pronoun, Seems Little Short Of Ludicrous.]

¶ 30. - Romans 11:1-6, 7-12, 20

As part of his criticism of the Jews' failure to respond to apostles like himself, Paul refers to Elijah's words in 1 Kings (19:10):

...³ Lord, they have killed thy prophets ... [NEB]

This was a largely unfounded accusation popular among some Jewish sectarian circles. Paul may have subscribed to it, but it is surely a telling silence that he does not add to this supposed record the ultimate atrocity of the killing of the Son of God himself. Then:

⁷... (Israel) was made blind to the truth ... ⁸(God) gave them blind eyes and deaf ears . . . ¹¹they stumble(d) ... ¹²trespass(ed) ... ²⁰(the Jews) were lopped off for their lack of faith.

Such mild language (cf. 1 Peter 2:8, the Jews who "stumble when they disbelieve the word": NEB) hardly seems to encompass the sin of deicide. Rather, it confirms the view that the Jews' guilt, in Paul's mind, is limited to their failure to heed the preaching apostles, to respond to the call to have faith in the spiritual Son, revealed by God, which Paul and others are delivering.

¶ 31. - Romans 12:3

Chapters 12 and 13 of the epistle to the Romans (next five items) are a treatise on Christian ethics. Several of their admonitions bear a strong resemblance to teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Yet not only are these not attributed to him, there is no mention even of the fact that Jesus was a teacher, that he was the very foundation of Christian ethics. Not only that, there seems little evidence in Paul's mind that *anything* has proceeded from Jesus, whether teachings or personal gifts. In 12:3, he says:

In virtue of the gift that God in his grace has given me . . . think your way to a sober estimate based on the measure of faith that God has dealt to each of you.

This does not sound like a man who has personally experienced a call by Jesus himself, either on the road to Damascus or anywhere else. Nor does it sound like one who possesses any sense of a Son who had lived an incarnated life during which he bestowed so much on his followers, and on the world, in the way of gifts, teachings and example. Paul goes on (v.4-5) to speak of himself and his readers as "limbs and organs, united with Christ, forming one body," a highly mystical concept which better fits a Christ who in Paul's mind is a cosmic, mythological figure inhabiting the heavenly world, to whom believers—in keeping with the philosophical outlook of the age, as reflected in the Greek mystery cults—could be united in spiritual ways.

¶ 32. - Romans 12:14

One of those elements of Christian ethics which bears resemblance to Jesus' Gospel teachings is this:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Matthew, in his Sermon on the Mount (5:44), has Jesus say: "Love your enemies, and pray for your persecutors." There are those who say that this admonition was a revolutionary one for the ancient world, and even the invention of Jesus himself. If so, it would seem natural that Paul would say so, that he would attribute such an innovative ethic to the man who had come up with it, to the man he has supposedly devoted his life to preaching.

¶ 33. - Romans 12:17-18

. . . Never pay back evil for evil . . . live at peace with all men.

This encapsules Jesus' other innovative admonition, as embodied in Matthew 5:38-39: "You have learned that they were told, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But what I tell you is this: Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left." In his study of Ephesians, E. L. Mitton argues that this ethical principle is "the spirit of Christ" embodied in his whole career on earth. Was Paul unaware of this? How can we explain Paul's astounding failure to quote a reference to Jesus' words which for two millennia have been held up as the quintessential Christian teaching (even if rarely followed): turn the other cheek? As for being at peace with all men, what of Matthew 5:24 with its admonition to "make peace with your brother"?

Paul even goes on (v.19-20) to *make* quotations to support his admonitions. What are they? They are Old Testament texts, verses from Deuteronomy and Proverbs. These include feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty, but Paul gives not a hint of Jesus' thoughts and directives on these very things.

[Can An Argument Like J. P. Holding's "There Was No Need" For An Explicit Reference To Jesus Possibly Hold Water Here? Paul Obviously Has A "Need" To Back Up His Admonitions With Some Sacred Support. Why Would He Choose Ancient, Anonymous Writings To Provide This When He Has The Very Words Of The Son Of God Himself During A Recent Earthly Ministry? Any Claim That Paul Could Have Been Ignorant Of Such Key Teachings, That He Would Have Been Conducting A Ministry Of His Own To

Preach Jesus Christ Without Knowing The Most Fundamental Things About Jesus' Career On Earth And The Ethics He Taught, Is Simply Too Ludicrous To Countenance. (Let's Keep A Conclusion Like This In Mind When We Get To The Appendix, With Its Discussion Of A Handful Of Allusions In The Epistles To Things Which May Sound Like References To A Presence Or Event "In Flesh," But Which Can Be Interpreted Otherwise: As Derived From Scripture, And As Fitting Into The Higher-World Mythological Thinking Of The Age.)]

¶ — Romans 13:3-4 - See "Top 20" #14

¶ 34. - Romans 13:7

Render to all what is due them: pay tax and toll, reverence and respect, to those to whom they are due. [NASB/NEB]

One could hardly get a closer sentiment to one of Jesus' most famous sayings, as recorded in Mark 12:17, Matthew 22:21, and Luke 20:25: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Even modern fiction writers have used this beautifully balanced dictum to portray Jesus as a politically correct maneuverer and one who could think on his feet. If Paul was familiar with it (and how could he not be, if anything of oral transmission had reached him?), is there any conceivable reason why he would not have referred to such a saying by Jesus to support his argument? (See the similar silence in 1 Peter 2:13).

¶ 35. - Romans 13:8-9

He who loves his neighbor has satisfied every claim of the law. For the commandment(s) . . . are all summed up in the rule, "Love your neighbor as yourself." [NEB]

In the Gospels, Jesus more than once (e.g., Mt. 22:39) quotes the "Love thy neighbor" commandment from Leviticus when asked for his opinion on the greatest commandment of them all. Paul twice (here and in Galatians 5:14) can express himself exactly as Jesus did and speak of the whole Law being "summed up" in the one rule, yet he shows no sign that he realizes he is doing so. Further directives on love in the epistles (e.g., James 2:8) similarly lack even a sideways glance at Jesus' sentiments on the subject.

¶ 36. - Romans 13:11-12

Following on Romans 8:19-23 (#25), Paul continues in the same vein about the expectant state of the world, and the present period of history leading up to the time of salvation:

¹¹Remember how critical the moment is . . . for salvation [deliverance] is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹²It is far on in the night; day is near. [NEB]

Day is near? There has been no dawn of any kind with the incarnation of the Son of God? Jesus' recent presence on earth had failed to dispel any of night's darkness? Even salvation itself is something which lies entirely in the future, and the only point of reference for it in the past is not

Christ's act of redemption itself, but the moment when Christians first believed in Christ. How can Paul use the word salvation and not introduce Jesus' own act?

This is not a post-messianic world, it is not post-Jesus. Paul and his apostolic colleagues have embarked on a mission that is entirely forward-looking. In Paul's mind, the factor which began it was not the life of Jesus, but the call by God, the revealed gospel, the long-hidden secret now disclosed: Christ himself, God's agent of salvation, the Son who will arrive for the first time at the imminent End, to bring night to a close and launch a new day.

¶ 37. - Romans 14:13

Let us cease judging one another, but rather make this simple judgment: that no obstacle or stumbling block be placed in a brother's way. [NEB]

Paul evidently felt no need to point out that Jesus himself had said: "Judge not, that you be not judged," as Matthew records in his Sermon on the Mount (7:1; cf. Lk. 6:37). That sermon also has things to say about how to treat a brother (5:22, 7:3-5) on which Paul is equally silent.

¶ 38. - Romans 14:14

I am absolutely convinced, as a Christian [as one who is in the Lord Jesus: NIV], that nothing is impure in itself. [NEB]

Here Paul also seems unaware of Jesus' pronouncements on the cleanness of foods. This was a burning issue within the early Christian movement. Was the new sect to continue to apply the strict dietary laws urged by the Pharisees, with their obsessive concerns over the purity of certain foods? If ever there were a moment amid an emotional argument when Paul would have seized on Jesus' own declared position for support, this passage in Romans is surely it. His silence can only indicate that he is truly ignorant of such scenes as those recorded in Mark 7 where Jesus accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy and tells the people: "Nothing that goes into a man from outside can defile him." The evangelist drives home the point by concluding, "Thus he declared all foods clean."

The same silence during a discussion about foods occurs in 1 Timothy 4:4. And the early 2nd century epistle of Barnabas devotes an entire chapter (10) to an attempt to discredit the Jewish dietary restrictions, yet not even here, not even this late, does a Christian writer who knows his traditional scriptures inside and out refer to Jesus' own words on the subject.

¶ 39. - Romans 15:3-4

³For Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me." ⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. [RSV]

Paul here draws on Psalm 69:9 to characterize—not Jesus' life, as G. A. Wells puts it (*Historical Evidence for Jesus*, p.36), but his exemplary sacrifice for the greater good, and his rejection by

the world (in the preaching movement) in parallel to the rejection experienced by the Christian believer. Wells points out that Paul, had he possessed any Gospel information on Jesus, might have drawn on Jesus' own saying, as in Mark 8:34: "If any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Instead, the voice of Christ, and with it knowledge about him, comes directly from the scriptures, a feature of early Christian thought we will encounter many times.

E. B. Cranfield (International Critical Commentary, *Romans*, p.732) admits that "it has struck many people as very surprising that at this point Paul should, instead of citing an example or examples from the history of Christ's earthly life, simply quote the Old Testament." Cranfield tries to rationalize this, but the real insight lies in verse 4. Not that Paul is reflecting his conviction that "Christ is the true meaning of the law and the prophets," as Cranfield declares, but that these sacred writings are the sole source of information about him, and the primary witness on which believers place their hopes, rather than on memories and traditions of Christ's recent words and deeds. This focus on passages from scripture rather than the record of Jesus' own life, whether oral or written, is a prominent feature of the epistles (see especially 2 Peter 1:19), and would be a bizarre choice in the context of a movement begun by a life which should still be vivid and alive in the minds of the members.

¶ — Romans 16:25-27 - See "Top 20" #2

1 & 2 Corinthians

1 Corinthians

▮ 40. - 1 Corinthians 1:1

From Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ at God's call and by God's will . . . [NEB]

At several places throughout his letters, Paul speaks of his summons to preach the Christ, and in virtually every place he identifies it as a call from God, not from Jesus. This consistent way of speaking belies the legend recounted in Acts that Paul, on the road to Damascus, underwent a personal vision of Jesus Christ which constituted a conversion experience and marked the beginning of his career as an apostle. Other passages (including writers speaking in Paul's name) which style his call as from God include: 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Galatians 1:16 and 2:8, 2 Corinthians 1:1, 3:6 and 10:13, Ephesians 1:1 and 3:7, Titus 1:3. In Galatians 1:1, he says he was sent "by Jesus Christ and God the Father," the only reference to a call by Jesus, and it is linked with God's. (I will not provide further discussion of these passages.)

[Note that his reference to "seeing the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8 is not specified as a conversion experience, and could be referring to a 'confirming vision' of the Son Paul received some time after his conversion. Certainly, the visions (1 Cor. 15:5-7) of Peter, James, the 500+ brothers, etc., were not conversion experiences, since these were people who were already believers and apostles. Paul lists his own right after them as though it were of the same nature as the rest. (It could well have been impelled by his need to undergo the same sort of vision as a means of validating himself as an apostle, as 1 Cor. 9:1f would indicate). And he goes on in 15:10 to speak of being "what I am" by the grace of God, not Jesus. Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 12:1, in recounting "visions and revelations granted by the Lord," fails to include any experience resembling the Damascus road legend, let alone refer to the call which led him to become an apostle.]

▮ — 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 - See "Top 20" #17

▮ 41. - 1 Corinthians 1:9

It is God himself who called you to share in the life [lit., fellowship] of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and God keeps faith. [NEB]

Once again, the focus is on God, whereas an apostle responding to a human Jesus of Nazareth would more likely envision that the call to the believer comes from the man he is preaching. If, however, Jesus is a figure entirely revealed by God through scripture (and supported by the occasional vision), Paul's theocentricity is understandable.

▮ 42. - 1 Corinthians 1:18-24(f)

¹⁸*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹*For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of*

the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰*Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ²¹*For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.*

²²*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* ²³*but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* ²⁴*but to those called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. [NIV]*

In Paul's great defense of his doctrine about the Christ, something which he admits strikes the non-believing world as ludicrous, he is at pains to point out just what it is about his gospel which has proven to be "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." What is it? Simply this (literally, in the Greek): "We proclaim Christ [having been] crucified."

Paul's statement seems to be one of simple fact: that Christ was crucified. Yet if Jesus' crucifixion had been a recent historical event, its mere occurrence, being a matter of record and public knowledge, would hardly prove a stumbling block or a folly to anyone. The proclaimed significance of that event might be so, but Paul does not suggest that he means it is the *interpretation* of the crucifixion which is the problem. Nor does he say the problem is that a crucified man is declared to be the Messiah—something that would indeed affront the average Jew. No, as Paul presents it, it is the doctrine itself that the Messiah was crucified which is being resisted.

Furthermore, the Greek verb is in the perfect tense, a tense which relates more to the ongoing effect in the present than to a simple statement of past occurrence. This is a recurring mode of expression (often simply in the present tense) which represents Christ and his actions as being in the 'now,' even as *speaking* in the now through the sacred writings. All this fits the concept of present revelation by God, of long-secret, higher world truths being disclosed and taking effect at the present time.

Thus Paul is saying that his preaching of a Messiah who is declared to have been crucified has been found unacceptable by those whom he associates with the wisdom of the world. *His* wisdom—God's wisdom—is that the Messiah *was* crucified, and that this is God's system of salvation. We may conclude, therefore, that Paul is not speaking of a verifiable, historical event, but of a heavenly, spiritual figure who is known only from scripture. Certain Jews and gentiles reject Paul's interpretation of this heavenly Messiah—that he was crucified (by whom, see next item). This interpretation differs from that of others—that he was *not* crucified. (I would claim that the latter refers to the apostle Apollos, whom Paul has just mentioned. See Supplementary Article No. 1: Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate for a full discussion of this passage.)

If Paul were preaching Jesus of Nazareth—a crucified man—as the Messiah and Savior, he would discuss it in such terms, especially since in this lengthy passage (extending to 2:10) he is defending his doctrine and defending God for the wisdom of his redemptive scheme. Yet there is not a word in these 24 verses about the human Jesus, about an earthly dimension, about the question of recognizing a crucified criminal as the Son of God and redeemer of the world. Indeed, the elevation of a man to divinity, the turning of an executed subversive into a part of the Godhead, would be, to almost all Jews, a stumbling block of such monumental proportions that it would dwarf any objection they might have to the claim that the Messiah had to undergo crucifixion. Paul is completely silent on the greatest folly of them all.

Instead, Paul 'defines' Christ as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (v.24). Consistent with everything else he says, he is defining a heavenly figure in terms of spiritual features (in the same way as one might define concepts like the Greek Logos and Jewish personified Wisdom); there is no sign that he is making a statement about a human man.

In verse 22, Paul points out that Jews look for miracles in support of any doctrine about God and salvation. It is strange, then, that he fails to call attention to any of Jesus' Gospel miracles as support for the claim that the crucified man of Nazareth had indeed been Messiah and Savior.

¶ 43. - 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Paul preaches "Christ crucified." But by whom? "The rulers of this age." Scholarly opinion has long been split on the meaning of this phrase, but liberal scholarship largely judges it to refer to the spirit forces which are regarded as dominating the present age of history. The ancients at this time viewed the lower levels of the heavens as inhabited by evil demons who controlled earth's fate and harried people's lives. It is they who would pass away when God's new age was established, and Christ's crucifixion is often spoken of as God's means to conquer the evil spirits and heal the split they have created between heaven and earth. (Cf. Col. 2:15, Eph. 1:10, 2:2, 3:10 and 6:12.) For a full discussion of the meaning of this passage, along with a partial list of scholars who support this interpretation, see Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?

It would seem that Paul locates Jesus' crucifixion in the spiritual realm at the hands of the evil spirits. (Cf. The Ascension of Isaiah, 9:13-14.) Those who acknowledge this meaning for "rulers of this age" sometimes attempt to qualify it by claiming that Paul envisions them working through the human authorities who, according to the Gospels, actually crucified Jesus, but Paul does not say this, and such an idea is nowhere present when we get to the Gospels and human authorities first start to be specified.

¶ 44. - 1 Corinthians 2:11-13

¹¹For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . [RSV]

Once again, Paul is impervious to the idea that Jesus on earth was someone who knew the mind of God and revealed it to humanity. Instead, in the preceding verses he has spoken of the Spirit as God's instrument of revelation, even of "the depths of God's own nature." One would have thought that the man who was in fact God's Son would have understood and revealed some of that nature. He goes on from verse 11 to say:

. . . ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us from God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

Can there be a more blatant exclusion of any sense of a recent Jesus of Nazareth, ministering on earth? Paul makes not the slightest glance in his direction here. All knowledge, all gifts, all wisdom have come from God through the Spirit. Even the concept itself of "words" that reveal God Paul cannot bring himself to attach to an historical preaching Jesus. Could Paul have been converted by a response to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth—even in his exalted, resurrected form—and have so completely erased him from all his thought and expression?

[A better indicator of just how Paul views a role for Christ comes a few lines later. In verse 16, Paul asks, through a quotation from Isaiah 40:13, " 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ." Prior to this, Paul has been speaking of God's Spirit. Now he suggests a definition for that Spirit and reveals another aspect of his thoroughly mythological and mystical view of the Son. Paul and other "spiritual men" are gifted with the Spirit, giving them the capacity to know God and the higher truths of the universe. This divine, inbreathed Spirit is "the mind of Christ," making Christ an aspect of God, the communicating, knowledge-bestowing element of God. In other words, the equivalent of 'hypostasized Wisdom.' This is a reflection of the overriding philosophical concept of the age, that the ultimate God related to the world of matter and humanity through a spiritual subsidiary and intermediary. In Paul, God's Spirit is moving further along the road to personification.

Paul's concept of possessing the mind of Christ should be viewed in parallel to his mystical ideas about sharing in Christ's 'body', the two—Christ and the collective believers—together constituting a mystical 'body' in itself. This is an idea related to the general mystery-cult concept of the age in which the initiate is united in some way with the spiritual substance and fate of the savior god. If Paul's concept of Christ's 'body' is acknowledged—and it usually is—to relate solely to the spiritual nature of the heavenly Christ, then his concept of Christ's 'mind' should also be seen to have no relation to any human embodiment.

Paul only occasionally makes this explicit identification of God's Spirit with Christ (e.g., Phil. 1:19, Gal. 4:6), for the more general Jewish meaning of the term is still very much a part of his own and his hearers' thinking. We'll look further at this view of Christ in 2 Corinthians 4:6.]

¶ 45. - 1 Corinthians 4:5

So pass no premature judgment; wait until the Lord comes. For he will bring to light what darkness hides, and disclose men's inward motives; then will be the time for each to receive from God such praise as he deserves. [NEB]

Another reference to the coming of Christ which lacks any sense that he had already been here, especially for its void on what Jesus might have done during his ministry in bringing light to darkness and disclosing people's thoughts.

¶ 46. - 1 Corinthians 4:11-13

¹¹*To this day we go hungry and thirsty and in rags; we are roughly handled, we wander from place to place.* ¹²*. . . They curse us, and we bless; they persecute us, and we submit to it. [NEB]*

Paul laments the treatment which apostles like himself are afforded by the world as they seek to spread the message about Christ. Could he have found no comfort in the words of Jesus himself, in his blessings on those who hunger and thirst and are persecuted (in the Sermon on the Mount), or when he said that the Son of Man was equally homeless and had nowhere to lay his head (Lk. 9:58 and parallels)? Should we not expect him to call attention to the fact that 'blessing those who curse you' was a direct admonition of Jesus (Lk. 6:28 and parallels)?

¶ 47. - 1 Corinthians 7:29

What I mean, my friends, is this. The time we live in will not last long. [NEB]

As part of the expectation of the imminent end of the age, Paul and other writers frequently make such predictions, often in the face of skepticism and opposition (e.g., 2 Peter 3:4). Here, surely, is a compelling need to refer to Jesus' own predictions about the nearness of the coming End, as in Matthew 10:23, Mark 13:30 and especially 9:1: "There are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the Kingdom of God already come in power."

Whether his readers already knew that Jesus had said things of this nature (and this should not always be taken for granted), the natural impulse for a writer in a situation like this would surely be to throw in the fact that Jesus' own words back up his claim. This is especially true when the subject being discussed is controversial, and when there is an element of persuasion being exercised on the reader to listen, to heed, to accept the idea being put forward. Yet it is precisely in contexts like these—and consistently so—that we encounter the lack of any appeal to an historical Jesus' words and deeds.

¶ 48. - 1 Corinthians 9:1-2

¹*. . . Am I not an apostle? Did I not see Jesus our Lord? . . .* ²*If others do not accept me as an apostle, you at least are bound to do so, for you are yourselves the very seal of my apostolate, in the Lord. [NEB]*

What was the basis on which Paul's apostleship was being challenged? Given the Gospel picture, one reason might seem obvious: he was not one of those chosen by Jesus during his ministry on earth. But the strange fact is that Paul, in all of his argumentation over the legitimacy of his position, never addresses the issue in these terms. He never says, "Yes, I know others followed Jesus in his earthly ministry, but the way in which I was called is just as worthy . . ." In fact, his arguments reject the idea that there is a difference on any basis whatsoever. The passage above shows that for him one important standard is the "seeing" of the Lord. This verb refers to a type of visionary or revelation experience. There is no sign anywhere that Paul entertains any distinction between knowing Jesus on earth and seeing him in the flesh, and knowing him through visions of his heavenly self. The former idea never puts in an appearance.

Even if it be claimed—as it often is—that Paul ignores such a distinction because he refuses to accept that it should be relevant, you can be sure his opponents would not be so obliging. This

distinction is the very thing one could expect they would throw in his face, and he would be forced to address it, like it or not. Besides, it is one thing to ignore something that everyone knows. It is another, as part of that process of ignoring, to cast things in terms which would be recognizably false and misleading, something which others would certainly not let him get away with.

But there is a conclusion to be drawn from this passage which scholars are reluctant to admit. Paul's claim that he too has "seen the Lord" implies that his type of seeing (which few would dispute was entirely visionary) is the same as that of the apostles he is comparing himself to; otherwise, his appeal to his own vision of the Lord as placing himself legitimately within their ranks would be meaningless. And since he goes on in the very next verses to refer to Cephas and "the Lord's brothers" (which can be taken in the sense of members of the sectarian brotherhood in Jerusalem of which James was the head: see my Response to Sean), we are justified in assuming that these are among the apostles he is comparing himself to. Thus the necessary conclusion is that these men too knew the Lord only by this kind of "seeing," namely a visionary one. Cephas and the Lord's brethren and the rest of the apostles knew nothing of a Jesus on earth, which is why we never encounter in Paul any reference to the appointment of apostles by a human Jesus.

▮ — 1 Corinthians 10:11 - See "Top 20" #16

▮ 49. - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

⁴There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . . ⁷In each of us the Spirit is manifested in one particular way, for some useful purpose. ⁸One man, through the Spirit, has the gift of wise speech . . . etc. . . . ¹¹But all these gifts are the work of one and the same Spirit, distributing them separately to each individual at will.

Passage after passage in Paul and other early writers give us a clear picture of the nature of the early Christian movement: the eruption of proselytizing apostles onto the 1st century scene, impelled by the conviction that the Spirit of God was speaking to them and sending them out with a new message of salvation, a conviction usually received from reading scripture. There is not an echo of what should be the prime factor in this movement, if the orthodox picture were correct: a network of apostles tracing their doctrine and authority back through a chain leading to those who were appointed and sent out by Jesus himself; in other words, a system of apostolic tradition and the sense that Jesus of Nazareth had begun the process. The latter is a concept which shows up only in the 2nd century as an adjunct to the development of the idea of an historical Jesus, to which authority and authenticity of doctrine is then attached.

Even if the work of God's Spirit were seen to be operating in the context of a movement begun with Jesus of Nazareth, that Spirit would have been linked in some way to him, as it eventually was—most dramatically in the Gospel of John, with Jesus' promise to send the Paraclete after his departure from the world. In fact, "John" came up with this concept in order to identify God's Spirit, hitherto the driving force of the movement, as proceeding from Jesus and being under his direction. As we have seen (1 John 4:1, #15), not even the Johannine epistles introduce the concept of the Paraclete in relation to the competing spirits which are abroad in the apostolic world.

¶ 50. - 1 Corinthians 12:28

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, etc. [NIV]

God has appointed? At the time 1 Corinthians was written (c.54?), the group of apostles in Jerusalem around Peter was presumably still alive and active (witness Galatians written around the same time). Why does Paul make no mention of any apostles appointed by Jesus himself? Were Peter and James and the rest not part of "the church"?

Paul's language creates a general picture, once again, of a movement formed by the activity of perceived communication from God, both as its original source and its continuing direction. There is not a whisper here of a beginning in an historical Jesus and the impact he is said to have had on the unfolding of the Christian movement.

¶ 51. - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

. . . There are three things that last forever: faith, hope and love: but the greatest of them all is love. [NEB]

A chapter on the subject of love which is 13 verses long, yet contains not a word about any teaching on the subject by an historical preaching Jesus.

¶ 52. - 1 Corinthians 14:36-37

³⁶*Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people to whom it came?*
³⁷*If anyone claims to be inspired or a prophet, let him recognize that what I write has the Lord's authority. [NEB]*

Once again, Paul's picture of the Christian movement is one exclusively dependent on the Spirit sent from God. Apostles make competing claims about their inspiration from the Lord (in this case, God). No provision, no appeal, is made to a recent Jesus of Nazareth, or to authority invested in those who had an earthly connection with him.

In light of the overwhelming impression contained in the last several items about the Spirit, that the engine of the Christian movement is direct revelation, or "reception" from God of the truths of the gospel message, the next item—the crucial passage of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8—allows for an interpretation which is quite different from that regularly given.

¶ 53. - 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (*kata tas graphas*), ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to [lit., was seen by] Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

I make a full discussion of this passage in Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel. Here I will highlight those elements relating to the theme of silence.

The first, following on the previous several items concerning the work of the Spirit, is that the verb "received" in the opening verse above must be taken in the sense of personal revelation, and not passed-on tradition through human channels from others. Not only does Paul show no sign anywhere else of receiving "apostolic tradition" in the sense of a gospel about Jesus which has come from those who supposedly knew him, he denies any such thing quite vehemently, namely in Galatians 1:11-12 where he states that he received his gospel "from no man, but from a revelation of/about Jesus Christ."

If verse 3's "received" thus refers to personal revelation, this has two immediate effects. The first is that the elements he states in his gospel, Jesus' death, burial and rising, are not likely to refer to historical events. If all three were the subject of eyewitness and historical record (at least from the Christian point of view), it would be more than faintly ludicrous for Paul to refer to knowledge of these things as coming to him through personal revelation. Second, he in fact tells us where he got such information: from the scriptures. Although *kata tas graphas* is regularly interpreted as meaning "in fulfilment of the scriptures" (an idea Paul nowhere discusses), it can just as readily entail the meaning of "as the scriptures tell us," and this fits the entire presentation of scripture in the early Christian epistles as the source of knowledge about the Christ, and even as the repository of Christ's own voice.

As I discuss in Article 6, the verb used for the "appearings" is regularly found in the context of personal visionary experience. And since Paul includes his own at the end of the list in such a way as to suggest that the nature of his experience is the same as all the rest, this leads to the conclusion that the itemized sightings of Jesus by the Jerusalem people refer similarly to perceived visionary experiences. This means that there is no necessary temporal connection between verse 3-4's death, burial and rising, and the series of visions. The former is the stated gospel about the Christ's redemptive acts in the spiritual realm, information which is derived from scripture. Both the gospel and the appearances are things which Paul has formerly "passed on," in the sense of told about, to the Corinthians, and about which he is reminding them here. The "received" idea applies only to the elements of the gospel. (See Article No. 6 for a full discussion of all these points.)

The other major silence to be addressed here is that this account of the appearances of Jesus does not fit the Gospel one. The latter, of course, is not a unified account, and in fact contains many contradictory elements between the various evangelists—not the least being the fact that the earliest Gospel, Mark, has no appearances of Jesus at all, while the later Gospels become ever more complex in their picture of the risen Jesus' activities. But what they all contain is something which Paul breathes not a word of: the first presence at the tomb, and the first sighting in all the later Gospels, being that of certain women. Where in all the early Christian epistles is there anything about Mary Magdalene and other women who were privileged to be the first to

receive the message about the resurrection and even the first sighting (in Matthew and John) of Christ's risen state? As for Paul's definite statement that Peter was the first to see the risen Jesus, not one Gospel agrees with him.

▮ — 1 Corinthians 15:12-16 - See "Top 20" #9

▮ 54. - 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

⁴⁵And so it is written: "The first man, Adam, was created to have a living nature; the last Adam to be a life giving spirit. ⁴⁶However, the spiritual (body) is not first; rather, the material (one), then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man (was) out of the earth, of earthly (material), the second man (is) out of heaven. . . ⁴⁹And as we bore the image of the one of earth, we shall also bear the image of the one of heaven. [Jean Hering, ED]

The interpretation of this passage is a complex question, and I refer the reader to Section III of my Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ as "Man": Does Paul Refer to Jesus as an Historical Person? Here I will make the point that translators are forced to put in a good many of the verbs, since Paul leaves most of them out, and they do so with Gospel preconceptions in mind. Verse 45 can be particularly misleading, and I have supplied the translation here of Jean Hering (*1 Corinthians*, p.175).

The basic point Paul is making throughout this part of the chapter is that human beings will undergo resurrection by taking on a new and different "resurrection body" whose nature will not be earthly flesh and blood. This resurrection body will be modeled on that of Christ, which verse 47 says is made of "heavenly material." The problem is, Paul fails to make any distinction between Christ's human body which he possessed during his time on earth, and the new body he possesses in heaven after his resurrection. This is a distinction which absolutely must be made, since the former cannot serve as the model. Paul would have to specify that he is speaking of Christ's body *after* his resurrection from the dead. In fact, all sorts of problems would result in Paul's discourse here by his silence on any such distinction. He makes no reference at all to Christ's earthly body.

Commentators often present their interpretation of this passage as though Paul does indeed specify that he is speaking of the risen body of Jesus, or is at least implying it. But even a cursory reading shows that Paul is silent on any such thing. Another way of looking at this silence is to point out that, in seeking to convince his readers that humans can be resurrected into another, spiritual body, he fails to draw on the obvious example of Jesus himself, whose human body was supposedly resurrected into a spiritual one. (Paul, by the way, shows no sign of regarding Jesus' 'resurrected' state as being "in flesh," and in fact his language rules out any such thing. This means that he and the Gospels, with their presentation of a Christ resurrected in a physical form, differ dramatically.)

Paul's use of the term "man" in relation to Christ cannot simply be assumed to refer to his human state, for this too would create difficulties for, and even stand in contradiction to, the things he says about Christ and his heavenly body. In fact, the term "man" can be taken in any of a number of mythological ways, fitting the hellenistic and apocalyptic outlooks of the time, as for example in Philo of Alexandria's "Heavenly Man." (See Article No. 8 for a full discussion of these questions.)

2 Corinthians

¶ 55. - 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 / 5:5

²¹Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ, and anointed us. ²²It is God also who has set his seal upon us, and as a pledge (arrabon) of what is to come has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts. [NIV/NEB]

Compare also 2 Corinthians 5:5: "God himself has shaped us for this very end; and as a pledge of it he has given us the Spirit."

The Translator's New Testament gives as a translation for the latter part of verse 22: "and given us the Spirit in our hearts as an installment and pledge of what is to come," and its Translation Notes make this observation: "The Greek word 'arrabon' is a commercial term for a part-payment that makes a transaction binding. The idea of 'installment' and 'pledge' are both included in it. Here the actual gift of the Holy Spirit is a guarantor also that there will be far more to come."

The two passages above could well have been included in the "Top 20," for there is a silence here which is nothing short of profound. We have God the prime mover and source of what it is to be Christian, God the one to whom Paul and his fellow believers feel the primary connection. Christian faith looks ahead to the promise of the future, and what does it see as the pointer to that promise? The life of Jesus? His sacrifice on Calvary? No, the giving of the Spirit, the inspiration which Paul and others feel has been given to them in conceiving and promulgating their gospel message. That is the mark of God's seal. As the embodiment and guarantee of God's promise of eternal life, he has sent—not Jesus, not the incarnated Son, but the Spirit, the inspiration accorded to Paul and his fellow apostles of the Christ.

Only a complete void on any knowledge of an historical Jesus could have led Paul to express himself in this fashion. Looking backwards, he sees the promise of salvation to be achieved at the imminent Kingdom as having had its first 'installment,' its 'pledge,' in the sending of the Spirit, not Jesus of Nazareth. The movement began not with an historical figure but with the coming of God's Spirit. Paul and the other epistle writers say this over and over, but probably nowhere so clearly as in this passage.

[The use of the phrase "in Christ" in verse 22 can now be seen for what it is. Christ is part of that "sending of the Spirit," for the inspired gospel found in the prophets (see Romans 1:1-4, 16:25-27, etc.) has brought God's word about him and about the mystical relationship which humanity is now to have with him as Lord and Savior. Like the Greek Logos concept, Christ is God's emanation, his subsidiary agent and communicating aspect. As mediator between God and the world, he is the shadow God casts, or rather the *light* he casts, for God, in the view of the philosophers, could not be seen, could not be touched. He was made visible to the intellectual eye, he made himself known to the material world, through secondary aspects. Those aspects had characteristics of their own—and roles to play in salvation. God's Spirit, or the Holy Spirit (alternatively, the concept of Wisdom in the scribal tradition) was the principal Jewish way of defining that communicating force. Paul represents a thought movement which has personalized this force to a new stage, that of a Son, a Savior, the bringer of the Kingdom when he arrives at the imminent End. Paul and the early Christians regard faith in this newly-revealed Son as God's method of salvation. One of the driving religious ideas of the age, as reflected in the developing mystery cults, was that of association with a divinity whose nature one could share in and whose saving activities involved paradigmatic parallels which effected certain guarantees

for the initiate. Since such relationships were not possible with the ultimate God, subsidiary divinities were needed. For the particularly Jewish sectarian expression (highly Hellenistic in some of its influences) which Paul represents, that divinity was the Son, Christ Jesus, found in scripture.]

¶ 56. - 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 / 8-9

⁴It is in full reliance upon God, through Christ, that we make such claims. . . . ⁶Such qualification as we have comes from God; it is he who has qualified us to dispense his new covenant—a covenant expressed not in a written document, but in a spiritual bond; for the written law condemns to death, but the Spirit gives life. [NEB]

More talk of the Spirit as the driving force of the new faith movement. Paul's authority and competence to act as an apostle comes from God. And how can Paul speak of the dispensation of the new covenant as a product of his own apostolic work, with never a glance at Jesus, in his own life and ministry, as the prime dispenser of that covenant? The covenant itself is expressed in the activities of the Spirit, not in Jesus' own recent activities. Note verse 4's use of "through Christ" (see previous item) in the sense of a channel of relationship to God.

Paul goes on to speak of the splendor (glory) in the face of Moses, reflecting the divine splendor, at the inauguration of the old covenant:

⁸But if so, must not even greater splendour rest upon the divine dispensation of the Spirit? ⁹If splendour accompanied the dispensation under which we are condemned [i.e., the glory of the old covenant's Mosaic Law, which Paul regards in a negative way], how much richer in splendour must that one be under which we are acquitted. [NEB]

Verse 8 draws a parallel to the dispensing of the old covenant, the parallel to the divine splendor present at the events of Sinai. Is it the splendor of the life and person of Jesus, his glorious sacrifice on Calvary? No, it is the giving of the Spirit from God, the force which has launched the apostolic movement of which Paul is a part. Here is where the splendor of the new covenant lies: squarely on Paul's doorstep. Jesus is not even let in by the servants' entrance. Would Paul really ignore the entire event of Jesus' life and career when moving from the old to the new "dispensations" in God's relationship with humanity? Once again, no historical Jesus intervenes in Paul's thought between the past and the present.

¶ 57. - 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

⁴The god of this age [=Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God . . . ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. [NIV]

Here Paul gives us further insight into the nature and role of the Son, according to the mystical philosophy of the time. The final phrase points to the fundamental character of Christ as the channel through which God is known. God is revealed through his emanations, through a spiritual intermediary personified as the Son. Here Paul styles him as having, or being, a "face." That face is not one which had been seen on earth by the eyes of ordinary men and women, but in the internal vision of the mystic, the "spiritual man" (1 Cor. 2:10-13) to whom God has

granted the light of his revelation. How did God give the light of knowledge about himself? Not through the person of a preaching Jesus, but through his revelation of the Christ, by the shining of light into people's hearts.

In 1 Corinthians 2:11-13, Paul spoke of the "mind" of Christ, which gives knowledge of the mind of God. Here, he is a "face," ultimately God's face. In neither passage is any reference made to the human career of Christ, and in fact verse 4 above shows that Paul's gospel is *about* the Son, who is defined as "the image of God." This is a Logos-type motif, entirely spiritual and mythological, and having nothing to do with earthly incarnation.

The phrase "light of the knowledge" is literally "the enlightenment of the knowledge," which is simply another way to describe the process of *revelation*. God has revealed himself through the intermediary Christ, a process which takes place "in the heart," further supporting the idea of revelation. If Paul knew of a Jesus on earth who had revealed God in his own person and ministry, he would have phrased things entirely differently.

¶ 58. - 2 Corinthians 4:13-14

¹³But Scripture says, "I believed and therefore I spoke out," and we too, in the same spirit of faith, believe and therefore speak out, ¹⁴for we know that he who raised the Lord Jesus to life will with Jesus raise us too, and bring us to his presence, and you with us.

Paul certainly suggests here that the knowledge of Jesus' raising is entirely a matter of faith, and nothing to do with eyewitness. The quote from scripture sets the meaning of Paul's statement: faith leads to declaration. If Jesus' raising were a matter of Christian historical record, we would expect him to appeal to it, using an expression like: "We believe that those who told us of seeing him alive after his death were speaking truth."

¶ 59. - 2 Corinthians 5:6-7

⁶We never cease to be confident. We know that so long as we are at home in the body we are exiles from the Lord; ⁷faith is our guide, we do not see him. [NEB]

Not: "we see him no longer," or some such sentiment, indicating that in the recent past men and women *had* seen the Lord, and that this witness to his life, death and resurrection was the guide to their actions, not faith with no witness. Paul consistently gives us the picture of a movement inspired entirely by faith, by conviction in what God has revealed. There is no suggestion that this does not apply to everyone: apostles, prophets, or anyone alive today. (Cf. Romans 8:24-25, 1 Peter 1:8.)

¶ 60. - 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

¹⁷When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone and a new order has already begun. ¹⁸From first to last this has been the work of God [lit., all this is from God], who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, having given us the ministry of reconciliation. . . [NEB]

What has effected the change from old to new? Not the work of Jesus, but the uniting of the believer to Christ; in other words, the mystical union with Christ achieved by the believer through faith. The historical Jesus as a pivot point in this sequence is nowhere to be seen. Paul goes on to assign this whole process of evolution to God, with not a glance at an earthly Jesus and his ministry.

The "through Christ," as we've seen in items 55 and 56, is representative of the spiritual Christ acting as the channel between God and man. What it does *not* signify is an earthly incarnation, for Paul expressly assigns the "ministry of reconciliation" to himself, with not even a suggestion that Jesus in *his* ministry played at least an equally significant role. The same combination is repeated in verse 19:

¹⁹What I mean is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding men's misdeeds against them, and that he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation.

Again, the "in Christ" draws the Son as the mediatorial, or intercessionary force—a spiritual one, not an earthly, since Paul goes on once more to identify *himself* as the bearer of the message of reconciliation between God and humanity, ignoring any message of reconciliation the earthly Jesus might have been involved in delivering.

²⁰We come therefore as Christ's ambassadors [lit., on behalf of Christ]. It is as if God were appealing to you through us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

If Paul is 'representing' Christ, it is strange that it is God doing the appealing to the believer, and not Jesus himself. This is resolvable, however, if we regard Christ as the spiritual intermediary, and not a recent human representative of God on earth, who should himself have been responsible for the reconciliation of people to God. One of the ideas we never encounter in the epistles, here or anywhere else, is that Paul and other apostles, in their preaching mission, are *continuing the work of the earthly Jesus*.

[The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, VIII, p.513, regards the first part of verse 20 this way: "As a preacher of the gospel the apostle is an authorized transmitter of the divine message and hence a representative of Christ. The urgent call of the apostle as he invites men to believe is thus a call which the exalted Christ Himself issues." Thus Paul speaks "on behalf of Christ" *in heaven*: pointing to his understanding of the Son as a spiritual mediator and channel to God.]

¶ — 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 - See "Top 20" #8

¶ 61. - 2 Corinthians 9:10

Now he who provides seed for sowing and bread for food will provide the seed for you to sow; he will multiply it and swell the harvest of your benevolence. [NEB]

These words trigger in us a memory of the famous miracle of the loaves and fishes, when Jesus pitied the crowd and multiplied the meager food available so that all might eat their fill. Paul here is searching for a metaphor to show that God will provide believers with "enough and to

spare" (preceding verse 8) in every situation. Would Jesus' miracle of the loaves and fishes not have been a vivid illustration of how God provides for his people? Had Paul not heard of this miracle? Had he heard of *any* miracle of Jesus?

¶ 62. - 2 Corinthians 10:7-8 / 11:22-23 / 12:11-12

⁷*Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's [NEB: that he belongs to Christ], let him remind himself that as he is Christ's, so are we.* ⁸*For even if I boast a little too much of our [i.e., my] authority, which the Lord [i.e., God] gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame. . . [RSV]*

In chapters 10 to 12, Paul is presenting a case for the defense of his apostleship, its legitimacy, its quality. What is once again lacking in this picture of the early Christian preaching movement is any reference to an historical Jesus as one who had appointed anyone to apostleship, or to whom anyone makes an appeal. In fact, in these three chapters, Paul gives us a decidedly different picture of the apostolic movement than the one tradition has derived from the Gospels and Acts.

In verse 7 above, Paul claims to be on an equal footing with the rival apostles who have undermined his position at Corinth. We don't know exactly who those rivals were, but any question of appealing to connections going back to a Jerusalem group who had known Jesus, or to Jesus himself, nowhere appears. Verse 8 rules such a thing out, for Paul speaks of authority which comes from the Lord, which here means God. Such a meaning is indicated, not only by Paul's general focus on God as the source of his call to apostleship, but by the comment he makes in 10:13, that an apostle's sphere of work is "laid down by God" to "preach the gospel about Christ." He speaks of being "recommended by the Lord" (10:18).

Two related passages in the following chapters again have Paul showing no knowledge of a distinction among apostles on the basis of having known and been appointed by Jesus in the flesh. In 11:22-23, he says:

²²*Are they Hebrews? So am I. Israelites? So am I. Abraham's descendants? So am I.*
²³*Servants of Christ? I am mad to speak like this, but I can outdo them. [NEB]*

And in 12:11-12, he says:

¹¹*. . . In no respect did I fall short of these superlative apostles, even if I am a nobody.*
¹²*The marks of the true apostle were there, in the work I did among you, which called for such constant fortitude, and was attended by signs, marvels and miracles. [NEB]*

In the first of the above passages, he goes on to list the sufferings and setbacks he has endured in the service of the gospel. In the second, the "marks of the true apostle" relate to the energy he brings to his work, to the signs (from God) that he has been given divine approval. Not only is there no question of requiring authorization from those who knew Jesus, or validation of a gospel according to accepted channels of apostolic tradition, Paul refuses to envision any measure by which he "falls short" of anyone else in the apostolic field. Jesus of Nazareth and his memory do not remotely inhabit this landscape.

[What picture of the early Christian apostolate is Paul presenting here? In these chapters, Paul is not making a comparison between himself and the Jerusalem group. He does have disputes with Peter and company (notably in Galatians 2), and there too he fails to

acknowledge any distinction between them and himself. But where the Corinthians are concerned, he is dealing with a wider world of apostleship, with rivals to whom he rarely puts a name, and whose challenges have nothing to do with any personal claims of contact with Jesus of Nazareth or, for that matter, with the Jerusalem apostles.

Scholars often claim that such competing apostles, even if they are not to be identified with "the Twelve," are nevertheless from Judea and have been sent out by the Jerusalem group; that the letters they bear (see 2 Cor. 3:1) are letters of authorization from them. If this were so, they could hardly have failed to argue this, forcing Paul to address such authorization in the defense of his own position. Other scholars suggest that in fact Paul is defending himself against the Jerusalem apostles in 2 Corinthians 10-12. The phrase "these superlative apostles" in 11:5 and 12:11 is, they say, an obvious reference to Peter and company. But in 11:13-15, Paul turns on these same men the full force of his ire:

"Such Men Are Sham-Apostles, Crooked In All Their Practices, Masquerading As Apostles Of Christ. . . But They Will Meet The End Their Deeds Deserve."

In Galatians 2, Paul Can Show Disdain Toward The Group Around Peter For Things They Have Done, But This Degree Of Vilification Would Not Be Possible. Elsewhere His Dealings With Them Are At Least Courteous, If Not Cooperative. And Throughout His Career He Is Engaged In Making A Financial Collection From His Gentile Communities On Behalf Of The Church In Jerusalem.

C. K. Barrett (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*) tries a compromise which doesn't work: the "superlative apostles" (11:5 and 12:11) refer to the Peter group, and the "sham-apostles" (11:13) are an unnamed set of rivals who have invaded his Corinthian flock. But Paul in this passage shows no sign of switching from one to the other, nor does Barrett offer any rationalization for him doing so which makes sense. Clearer-headed commentators acknowledge that nowhere in this passage is any link made between Paul's rivals in Corinth and the Jerusalem church.

We are thus faced with a picture of a Christian apostolic movement operating in the Diaspora which neither possesses nor claims any connection to a privileged group of apostles in Jerusalem, and certainly not to a human Jesus of Nazareth through such a group. No matter who Paul is dealing with, the Petrine group or otherwise, no hint of a human Jesus to whom apostles trace their authority can be detected. (For a fuller discussion of the question of apostleship, see Supplementary Article No. 1: Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate.)]

¶ 63. - 2 Corinthians 11:4

If in Paul's world no one appeals to a connection with Jesus of Nazareth or with those who had known him, what is the authority on which each apostle's claim rests? We saw it in the epistle 1 John 4:1f (see "Top 20", #15), and we see it here in Paul's admonishment of the fickle Corinthians:

For if someone comes who proclaims another Jesus, not the Jesus whom we proclaimed, or if you then receive a spirit different from the gospel you have already accepted, you manage to put up with that well enough. [NEB]

The phrase "receive a spirit" refers to the Corinthians' acceptance of an inspired apostle who preaches according to the spirit which he thinks he has received from God. Paul is referring to other apostles who preach under the influence of perceived inspirations different from his own, and the object of those inspirations is a dramatically different view of Jesus than the one he has acquired. So dramatic, that a few verses later he can condemn them as "sham-apostles . . . masquerading as apostles of Christ," and declare that "they will meet the end their deeds deserve."

Such extreme language can hardly refer, as some commentators maintain, to differences surrounding the application of the Jewish Law. This is the picture of fundamentally contrasting interpretations of the Christ himself, which could not have arisen within the context of the orthodox Gospel picture of an apostolic movement begun and coordinated from a group of Twelve followers of Jesus operating out of Jerusalem. It makes sense only in the context of a faith system spread over much of the empire whose proponents, like Paul, have derived their ideas from scripture and the going philosophies of the day. These various and rival apostles of the Christ, none of whom make any connection with a Jerusalem parent body let alone Jesus himself, are part of a level playing field. Each apostle, like Paul, makes his own claim to veracity and authority based on personal inspiration and calling by God. The engine of the early Christian movement is not the memory of Jesus, his words and deeds kept alive and transmitted through a channel of witnesses and those in turn whom they have instructed and authorized. Rather, it is the spirit of God bestowed individually on Christian prophets, the chosen recipients of revelation from the Father. Such a picture is clearly presented by the epistle writers at every turn.

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

Galatians

¶ 64. - Galatians 1:11-12

¹¹For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. [NASB]

Nothing could be more clearly stated. Paul has arrived at his knowledge and doctrine of the Christ he preaches through personal revelation. He denies receiving anything from other men, by teaching, by passed-on apostolic tradition. We are entitled, therefore, to regard the gospel he spells out in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, as well as the information he gives the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23f, as a product of revelation, and not handed-on tradition from others. (He uses the same verb, *paralambano*, in all three places.) This conclusion is thoroughly argued in my Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel.

Paul obviously considers that the revelation he has received from God is more valid and important than anything which other men might have to teach him. But is it conceivable that he could so blithely disparage and reject the value of anything which the apostles who had accompanied Jesus in his earthly ministry might have to offer? Indeed, we never get a hint that Paul derived any information about Jesus from the Jerusalem apostles. Such a turning up of the nose at oral tradition from the men who had known and heard Jesus himself would have drawn justifiable criticism, not only from the Jerusalem apostles themselves, but from other Christian preachers in the field, and Paul would have been forced to respond to it. Some hint of that criticism and its basis would have surfaced in his letters when he discusses the value and validity of his own apostleship and gospel. None ever does.

In such an absence, we can see Paul's point here. The superior apostle is he who is blessed with direct revelation from God. Others might teach Christ, but they relied on learning about him from those who had favored access to the pipeline of divine disclosure.

We should stand in astonishment at this picture of the premier apostle of the period passionately defining the highest measure of reliability and authenticity for a Christian preacher's gospel: not that it had its roots in the things Jesus had done and taught on earth, not in Jesus' own delegation of authority during his ministry, not through any apostolic channel which went back to a genesis in the Lord's own life, but through a divine revelation, the spirit of God bestowed individually on chosen Christian prophets! Amazingly, Paul is acknowledging no gospel of Jesus going back to Jesus. He is allowing for no primacy of any gospel held by those who had seen, heard and followed the Lord while he was on earth, no superiority of any apostle who had been appointed by Jesus himself. Either Paul was guilty of the most supreme arrogance, or else such concepts simply did not exist for him.

¶ 65. - Galatians 1:13

You have heard what my manner of life was when I was still a practicing Jew: how savagely I persecuted the church of God, and tried to destroy it. [NEB]

A church founded by the followers of the earthly Jesus, who had personally chosen them as apostles and had directed them to teach all nations—and yet Paul calls it "the church of God"?

On the other hand, if that church had formed as a result of God's revelation through the Spirit (as Paul and other epistle writers repeatedly say), with Jesus merely the content of that revelation, the term is perfectly apt.

¶ 66. - Galatians 2:6

But as for the men of high reputation [or, seeming to be important]—not that their importance matters to me: God does not recognize these personal distinctions— [NEB]

Here Paul disparages the importance of Peter and the other Jerusalem apostles as being neither of any concern to him, nor to God for that matter. How could Paul, as self-important as he is, dismiss with such disdain the very chosen apostles of Jesus, particularly the one on whom Jesus is supposed to have "built his church" (Mt. 16:18)? Paul then goes on (next passage) to parallel his own appointment to apostleship by God with Peter's appointment—also by God. Paul not only ignores any superior position of Peter by virtue of having been chosen and elevated by Jesus himself, he excludes it!

¶ — Galatians 2:8 - See "Top 20" #6

¶ 67. - Galatians 2:14

But when I saw that their conduct did not square with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas, before the whole congregation, "If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, and not like a Jew, how can you insist that Gentiles must live like Jews?" [NEB]

Perhaps no issue in Christianity's earliest period loomed larger and had a more divisive effect than this one: to what extent were gentile converts to the faith required to conform to the Jewish Law, particularly in regard to circumcision for males and to eating practices? If ever there were a compelling need to draw upon the teaching and example of Jesus, it would be in the context of these crucial debates. Yet in passages like this one, in which Paul recounts how Peter suspended his willingness to eat with gentiles, we get not a hint of any such appeal.

Gospel scenes such as Mark 2:15-17 and Luke 5:30-32 have Jesus defending himself against criticism for sharing his table with tax collectors and sinners. Could this exemplary behavior not have served Paul as an argument against Peter's unwillingness to share meals with gentiles? (The tax gatherers may have been mostly local Jews, but the principle was still the same: engaging in table fellowship with the unclean.) Such considerations belie the whole rationalization that Paul felt no interest in the earthly life of Jesus and would not have wished or needed to draw upon it in his missionary work. The opening line of the above passage should really have read: "But when I saw that their conduct did not square with Jesus' own conduct . . ."

[Note that it would not matter if Jesus had actually pronounced on the issue under debate or not. The needs of such polemical situations would inevitably have led to the development of a tradition that he *had* said something. What we see in the Gospels, of course, is this process in reverse. General developments by reform-minded sectarian circles (here, relaxing the purity rules to allow mixed table fellowship) became focused and personified in a founding figure who had actually taught such things and to whom appeal could now be made for authority. This was one of the paramount purposes served by the Gospels.]

¶ 68. - Galatians 3:23-25

²³Before this faith came, we were close prisoners in the custody of the law, pending the revelation of faith. ²⁴Thus the law was a kind of tutor in charge of us until Christ should come [or, tutor to conduct us to Christ], when we should be justified through faith; ²⁵and now that faith has come, the tutor's charge is at an end. [NEB]

In the passage leading to these verses, Paul is explaining and justifying his suspension of the Jewish law as a requirement for salvation. In its place stands only "faith in Jesus Christ" (verse 22). And what is it that marks the great turning point, the passing away of the law's term of effect and usefulness? Not the arrival of Christ himself, not his career on earth, but the beginning of *faith* in him, meaning the response of believers to the gospel, revealed to and preached by apostles like Paul.

Verse 24's "until Christ came" (NEB and a few others) is a wishful translation of a simple *eis Christon* (to Christ), which although conceivably translatable as "to the time of Christ," benefits from the more common translation of "leading one to Christ," meaning to faith in him; alternatively, it could mean to the time of Christ's revelation. Either one fits the thought voiced in both flanking verses which speak of the arrival of faith, not of Christ himself. Note that in verse 23 Paul speaks of the "revelation" of faith, or the "faith to be revealed." Such an expression makes sense only in the context of what the epistles are continually saying: that the doctrine about the Christ, the very existence of the Son, is something that has been revealed by God in the present time to apostles like Paul (Romans 16:25-27, 1 Peter 1:20, etc.)

¶ 69. - Galatians 4:4-6

⁴But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of (a) woman, born under the law, ⁵in order that he [God] might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Father!" ⁷Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. [NASB]

Many point to this passage as "proof" that Paul knows and is speaking of an historical, human Jesus. I deal with this passage extensively in my Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ As "Man", and it will also be discussed in the Appendix to this feature. Here I will point out the basic difficulties in so relying on this passage.

The two "sent" verbs of verses 4 and 6 are exactly the same, yet the latter specifies that it is the Son's spirit which God sends, not his bodily person. And when is it that God "sent his son"? When "we were children" (4:1) in order to confer the rights of sons, which happens when God sends the Son's spirit, all of which happens in the Pauline present. Most perplexing of all, why in the phrase "to redeem those under the law" is it, grammatically speaking, *God* who is doing the redeeming and not Jesus himself? The same oddity occurs in verse 7. As the NEB phrases it: "You are . . . also by God's own act an heir." Why is Paul incapable of focusing on Jesus, in his recent incarnation and historical deeds of redemption, as the source of all these benefits?

[I often quote Burton's observation (International Critical Commentary, *Galatians*, p.218-19) that, grammatically speaking, the phrases "born of woman [Burton prefers it without

the article], born under the law" are not necessarily linked temporally with the "God sent his Son," but are simply stated characteristics of the Son. And why is Paul bothering to say at all that Jesus was born of (a) woman? Would this not be self-evident if he was an historical man? Rather, he needs to make a paradigmatic parallel with those being redeemed, who were themselves born of woman and born under the law. Heavenly counterpart figures could guarantee certain effects on their initiates precisely because they reflected, or underwent, the same features and experiences as their earthly counterparts. Can a spirit world deity be 'born of woman'? He can in the mythical sense (as with the savior god Dionysos), and he can if scripture says that he was. The famous Isaiah 7:14, "A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son and will call him Immanuel," was a prominent messianic text which early Christians could not ignore. Even the "born under the law" might, in Paul's very imaginative use of scripture, be derived from his interpretation of Christ as Abraham's "seed" in Galatians 3:16.]

¶ 70. - Galatians 4:22-31

For it is written that Abraham had two sons . . . (etc.)

In Galatians 4:22-31, Paul makes his own interpretation of the story of Abraham and the two sons he had by his two women. The first woman is Abraham's concubine, the slave Hagar; she gives birth to Ishmael, who stands for the Jewish race who still exist in slavery under the Law and the old covenant. That race and that covenant is represented by Mount Sinai. And what is the other half of the parallel? The second woman is Abraham's legitimate wife, the free-born Sarah; she is the mother of Isaac, the true inheritor of God's promise, Abraham's spiritual heir. In a manner unspecified, Paul links his gentile readers with Isaac; they too are children of the promise, children of Sarah who is symbolized by the heavenly Jerusalem. This represents the source of the new covenant.

Paul strains for some of this allegory, but on the surface the whole thing might seem to hang together. Yet something seems to be missing here, something we would expect to find, especially as Christ "born of woman" is still fresh in Paul's mind. He is talking about mothers and sons. Why is Mary not worked into this analogy, if only as a secondary part of the interpretation? She was after all the mother of Jesus himself who established the new covenant. She is surely a type to Sarah's archetype (meaning a later representation of some archetypal figure in scripture; or to put it another way, the scriptural figure or element prefigures the later one). So is Jesus himself to Isaac, both symbols of sacrificed victims. (Even though Isaac was not actually killed, he assumed this significance in Jewish thinking.)

Paul has spent much of Galatians 3 linking the gentiles to Abraham through Christ as his "seed": why not double such a link through Mary and Sarah? Could not Mary be allegorized as the mother of Christians? Where, for that matter, is the thing which should have been obvious as the symbol of the new covenant, in parallel to Mount Sinai as the symbol of the old one: not the heavenly Jerusalem but the Mount of Calvary where Jesus was crucified, site of the blood sacrifice which had established that new covenant?

Paul once again shows himself to be totally immune in his thought and expression to all aspects of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth.

¶ 71. - Galatians 5:14

For the whole law can be summed up in a single commandment: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [NEB]

This is the second time (cf. Romans 13:8) that Paul expresses himself exactly as the Gospel Jesus does and speaks of the whole Law being summed up in this one rule from Leviticus. In neither place does he show awareness of any tradition that Jesus had made this a centerpiece of his teaching (eg, Mt. 22:39). Paul may, if we are to believe the usual rationalization, have had "no interest" in Jesus' ministry and the things he did on earth, but if he knew the bare fact that Jesus had taught (and how could he not?), he must have heard that the love commandment had figured prominently in that teaching. It is hard to believe that his lack of interest was so profound, indeed so pathological, that he would in several places in his letters speak of the ethics of Christian love and yet refuse to even suggest that such teaching had anything to do with the historical preaching Son of God.

Ephesians

¶ 72. - Ephesians 1:7-10

(After speaking of the redemption and forgiveness of sin gained through the blood of the Son) ⁷. . . Therein lies the richness of God's free grace lavished upon us, ⁸imparting full wisdom and insight. ⁹He [God] has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in him(self)—¹⁰to be put into effect in the fullness of time, namely that the universe, all things in heaven and on earth, should be brought into a unity in Christ. [NEB/KJ]

A somewhat convoluted and ambiguous passage in the Greek, but one thing is clear: the absence of any historical Jesus in the thinking of this pseudo-Pauline writer. If Christ's "blood" is regarded as spiritual and shed in the mythical realm, the rest of the sentence speaks of God's revelation in Paul's time, of the mystery that the sundered universe (it was one of the concepts of the era that the evil spirits had divided heaven from earth) was to be brought back into a unity through the Son's spiritual sacrifice. The "fullness of time" (v.10) is marked, not by the sacrifice itself, let alone by any life and ministry of the Son, but by the revelation of God's intentions to such as Paul, and the reunification of things earthly and heavenly; the latter is an entirely mythological event which was hardly verifiable through historical or material world observation. Note also that verses 7 and 8 speak of God's grace being lavished upon us, but is that grace the person and event of Jesus of Nazareth? No, it is the "wisdom and insight" which God has bestowed, again fitting the context of revelation. (This is followed in verse 9 by a revelation word, *gnoridzo*.) Revelation *about* the Son, not the arrival of the Son himself.

There are many uses of "in Christ" in this passage (see 1:3f), but all of them fit the context of Christ as spiritual channel and divine agency operating in a mythical setting; what we do not find is the phrase attached to any mention of an historical event.

¶ 73. - Ephesians 1:19-23

¹⁹. . . *They (God's resources and power) are measured by his strength and the might*
²⁰*which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead, when he enthroned him at*
his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹*far above all government and authority, all*
power and dominion, and any title of sovereignty that can be named, not only in this age
but in the age to come. ²²*He put everything in subjection beneath his feet, and appointed*
him as supreme head to the church, ²³*which is his body and as such holds within it the*
fullness of him who himself receives the entire fullness of God. [NEB]

I quote this passage to make a point about one of the vast and fundamental silences found in the epistles, in their frequent portrayal (cf. Col. 15-20, Heb. 1:2-3, etc.) of Christ in such lofty terms. Never is there mention that this cosmic Son of God, on whom is bestowed full divinity and power over all things, filling and sustaining the entire universe, to whom believing humanity is mystically united, was formerly on earth as a humble Jewish preacher known as Jesus of Nazareth. Nowhere does anyone deal with the bizarre and blasphemous phenomenon that a crucified criminal, ignominiously executed on a hill outside Jerusalem, has been raised—among Jews, no less—to such an exalted and unprecedented status, the equal of God himself. No one ever speaks of or defends the need for Christians to believe in this startling transformation of a human man. This is undoubtedly the single greatest silence that resounds throughout the early Christian record.

¶ 74. - Ephesians 2:17-18

¹⁷*And he came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who*
were near, ¹⁸*for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. [NASB]*

Is verse 17 a reference to Jesus' teaching ministry on earth? Instead of taking the opportunity to refer to some of those teachings (such as Mt. 5:23 which speaks of "peace" with one's brothers, or the message that is to be brought to "all nations"), the writer quotes Isaiah 57:19, which supposedly speaks of an end-time reconciliation between peoples. Even the preliminary words about preaching good news is based on Isaiah 52:7.

This passage is not a reference to an historical event, but an interpretation of scripture, an expression of the early Christian idea (found notably in Hebrews) that the Son inhabited the spiritual world of the scriptures and spoke from there. Another common idea was that Christ had "come" through his revelation by God to Christian prophets. He was now active in the world and speaking through those prophets (the verb *euangelidzo*, to proclaim good news, is used to describe the work of apostles like Paul). Verse 18 also reflects the role of the spiritual Christ in providing a channel to the Father.

In this connection we might ask why the writer would have passed up Gospel sayings of Jesus about himself as providing access to God, such as John 10:7, "I am the door," or 14:16, "No one comes to the Father except by me," or Luke 10:22, "No one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

(This passage will be dealt with again in the Appendix.)

¶ 75. - Ephesians 2:20-21

You are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the foundation-stone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [NEB]

A telling omission here. The foundation of Christian belief and the movement itself is the work of apostles and prophets like Paul. This entirely ignores the career of Jesus himself. Christ Jesus as the "foundation stone" is simply the object of the faith laid by the apostles. If Jesus of Nazareth had lived and begun the movement in his name, no Christian writer could have failed to designate Jesus as the initial, primary builder of the church. And where is Jesus' own quote of Psalm 118:22, referring to himself: "the stone which the builders rejected has become the main cornerstone," as recorded in Mark 12:10?

C. L. Mitton (*Ephesians*, p.113) suggests that the meaning of *akrogoniaios* (cornerstone) in LXX Isaiah 28:16 determines its meaning in Ephesians, but this merely serves to show that the idea has been derived not from historical tradition but from scriptural exegesis. Mitton also suggests that the apostles and prophets are to be regarded as part of the foundation as well, alongside Christ, but there is no justification for this in the text.

¶ 76. - Ephesians 3:4-6 (+7-11)

⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets through the spirit, ⁶that through the gospel the Gentiles are to be fellow heirs and fellow members of the promise in Christ Jesus. . . . [NIV]

Here we see the sole mechanism of revelation at work in the preaching of apostles like Paul, the revelation of the mystery, the secret, about Christ. It is not on passed-on tradition going back to Jesus himself and his immediate followers that Christian apostles base their knowledge and authority, but on the action of the spirit sent from God. It is true that, while other passages, like Colossians 2:2, speak of God's long-undisclosed mystery as being Christ himself, here (and compare Col. 1:27) the secret is narrowed to something specific, namely the inclusion of the gentiles in the redemptive effects of God's salvation through Christ. This specificity is often appealed to as rendering the thought valid within the context of an historical Jesus, on the assumption that the inclusion of the gentiles was not an identifiable mark of Jesus' own preaching.

But is this really a legitimate 'out'? Would apostles preaching such a doctrine not seek to find its legitimacy and precedent in the preaching of Jesus, to anchor it in the example of Jesus welcoming the sinner, having contact with non-Jews, etc.? It is virtually impossible that they would not, for sectarian impulses are always to give the sect's important doctrines the strongest possible foundation and authority. Indeed, it is unthinkable that in all the references to revealing the secret of Christ, whatever its nature, no Christian writer would ever express the thought that the first and primary revealer of such secrets had been Christ himself during his ministry on earth. This silence is a devastating one.

Besides, what of Jesus directives (Mt. 28:19, Acts 1:8) to go and preach to all the nations, an instruction which would automatically have encompassed Ephesians' idea here that the gentiles

were to be included in the redemptive promise? How could this writer not possess any tradition of such a directive (even if not an historical one) by Jesus? Mitton (p.123) states (based on the Gospels) that "this breaking down of barriers (between Jew and gentile) had been the mark of Jesus in his life and teachings," but if modern scholars can recognize the obvious, can we believe that Paul and other early writers did not, or chose to ignore it?

[Consider verses 10-11: "(God's hidden purpose was concealed for long ages) ¹⁰in order that now, through the church, the wisdom of God in all its varied forms might be made known to the powers and authorities in the realm of heaven, ¹¹in accord with his age-long purpose which he effected in Christ Jesus our Lord." Again, the long-hidden wisdom of God in all its forms is revealed not by an historical Jesus in his life and ministry, but only now, in Paul's time, by apostles like himself and "the church." The role of Christ in verse 11 relates to that "age-long purpose" and not specifically to the present time, in which (as in v.10) Christ plays no role alongside the church that reveals God's wisdom. Mitton (p.128) insists on interpreting the "in Christ" as referring to the actions or example of Jesus of Nazareth in his earthly life, but it better fits the general meaning of this kind of phrase as used throughout the epistles: God is the agent, Christ is the 'enabling force' he employs for both redemption and intermediary communication, all of it within a mythological and spiritual setting in keeping with the philosophy of the time.

And who, in these verses, is the recipient of that long-hidden wisdom of God? If there is any passage which stops us short and indicates that the writer is operating in a different realm of thought from our own, it is this one. The revelation of the wisdom of God is being aimed at the rulers and authorities in the realms of heaven, so that they will become aware of God's plan and the world's destiny! In other words, the hostile spirits and wicked powers are real and key elements in the world view and theology of the New Testament writers. (Mitton's "rather surprisingly" is an understatement, and his suggestion that "this may have meant little more to the writer than it can mean to us, except as rhetorical flourish," reflects the inability of many a modern commentator to perceive and accept the gap that exists between the ancient mind and ours, and with it how shaky are all the assumptions and mindsets we often bring to the originators of the Western world's faith. See also Ephesians 6:11-12, #85.)]

¶ 77. - Ephesians 4:1-2

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [NIV]

No reference to Jesus here as an example of such behavior, or to the teachings which contained such recommendations. Yet Matthew (11:29) records a saying by Jesus in which he describes himself using precisely these two words: humble and gentle. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." One might expect this to be a well known saying in the Jesus tradition, one that provoked controversy for its audacity when it was first spoken. Yet the writer passes up the chance to quote it, to reinforce his own urging by pointing out that Jesus had described himself with these selfsame words, providing the ideal example. Even if the saying itself was not widespread, surely the tradition that Jesus was "meek and mild" enjoyed wide currency.

In reality, this is a wisdom saying, similar to those placed in the mouth of personified Wisdom in documents like Proverbs, and was eventually placed in the mouth of the Gospel Jesus.

¶ 78. - Ephesians 4:8-12

⁸Scripture says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train, and gave gifts to men." ⁹Now, the word 'ascended' implies that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth. ¹⁰He who descended is no other than he who ascended far above the heavens, so that he might fill the universe. ¹¹And these were his gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ. [NEB/NIV]

As extremely revealing passage. The writer uses the Psalm quote (68:18) for two purposes. One is to 'prove' that Christ descended to earth, since the act of 'ascending' on high implied that he had done so from a lower level. (Some translators point out that "lower parts of the earth" could mean the underworld, but this is not likely since the writer speaks of Christ acting among men, not in Sheol.) But why would he need to appeal to such 'proof' if Christ had lived a recent life in full view of all? This strange, even bizarre, thought suggests that what was lacking in the writer's mind was the historical knowledge that indeed Jesus had been on earth.

And what had he done while in that lower location? In fact, the writer seems not to be trying to imply a 'life' at all, no physical presence on earth. Certainly there is no description of physical events, let alone Gospel details. Rather, he is concerned with Christ's bestowing of gifts which are spiritual in nature (and bestowed through spiritual channels), namely the calling of various people to roles in the spread of the faith, in the building up of the body of Christ, which is an entirely mystical concept. The gifts enumerated betray no sense of the Gospel career of Jesus of Nazareth, but fit the concept that the spirit of God or Christ had implanted inspirational qualifications for a call to Christian community service. This is the second purpose of the Psalm quote, to indicate that Christ had come down to bestow these gifts—although to do so the writer reverses the actual content of the Psalm's verse, where the figure addressed is *receiving* gifts from men. Such were the liberties of midrash.

Note that the significance for the writer of the "captives in his train" relates to the cosmic powers of the heavens, over which Christ is said to triumph through his spirit world sacrifice. (Compare Col. 2:15 and, as always, 1 Cor. 2:8.)

¶ 79. - Ephesians 4:23-24

You must be made new in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature of God's creating.
[NEB]

Here the writer seems to be unaware of Jesus' teaching that we must be "born anew," as in John 3:3.

¶ 80. - Ephesians 4:26

If you are angry, do not let anger lead you into sin. [NEB]

The writer fails to bolster his admonition by quoting the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:22): "Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgment." One of the ironies found in most commentaries, such as that of Mitton on Ephesians, is their

unfailing habit of faithfully recording such Gospel parallels without asking why, in contrast, the writers of these epistles pervasively fail to point to Jesus as the source of such ethical directives.

¶ 81. - Ephesians 4:32

Be generous to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. [NEB]

Here, too, the writer fails to quote not only Jesus' teachings on the subject of forgiveness (e.g., Mt. 6:14: "For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," Mt. 18:21, etc.), but Jesus' own exemplary words from the cross: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). The latter would have been a powerful illustration of forgiveness under even the most dire of circumstances, and if such traditions and teachings existed, there can be no doubt that the writer of Ephesians would have called attention to them.

¶ 82. - Ephesians 5:2

Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. [NEB]

Yet another passage which urges love on the believer without noting that this had been a pillar of Jesus' teaching on earth. We might also take note of the atmosphere of the writer's reference to the crucifixion. It lacks all sense of the Gospel portrayal of that event as the ignominious execution of an innocent man, an evil deed accompanied by betrayal and taunts and false accusations, all of it provoking God's divine wrath. (Compare the similar lack of Gospel atmosphere in Romans 8:32.)

¶ 83. - Ephesians 5:8

For though you were once all darkness, now as Christians you are light. Live like men who are at home in daylight, for where light is, there all goodness springs up, all justice and truth. [NEB]

Would not Jesus' own description of the believer from the Sermon on the Mount (5:14-16) be apt here: "You are light for all the world . . . and you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows, so that when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven"? Or John's words of Jesus (8:12): "No follower of mine shall wander in the dark; he shall have the light of life." (Compare 12:36.)

The writer of Ephesians can know nothing about any teachings of Jesus to so consistently fail to appeal to them in the many and varied contexts of ethical admonition throughout his letter. In this, of course, he joins company with every other epistle writer.

▮ 84. - Ephesians 6:8

For you know that whatever good each man may do, slave or free, will be repaid him by the Lord. [NEB]

Did Jesus not teach that the good will be rewarded? "Your father who sees what is done . . . will reward you" (Mt. 6:4), "that man will not go unrewarded" (Mt. 10:42), "the Son of Man will give each man the due reward for what he has done" (Mt. 16:27), and so on. How much energy would it have taken for *some* of these writers, *some* of the time, to give us a simple "as Jesus said" or "as Jesus taught us"?

▮ 85. - Ephesians 6:11-12

¹¹Put on all the armor which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. ¹²For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. [NEB]

One of the resounding silences in both Ephesians and Colossians is their failure to point out the victories which Christ on earth achieved against the forces of darkness. Both these epistles illustrate the ancient world's preoccupation with inimical spirit powers (which they saw as inhabiting the very air around them) and forces of Fate, and the evil effects these had on human lives. This fear of demons, and the search for ways to neutralize their activities through magic and the invocation of protective deities, was especially strong in pagan society. The central declaration about Jesus in both Colossians and Ephesians is that he is such a deity, that his death has rescued mankind "from the domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13), that "every power and authority (i.e., the spirits) in the universe has been subjected to him" (2:10), and that a universe fractured by the power of those spirits has been reunified by Christ's sacrifice (Eph. 1:10, cf. 3:10). Ephesians 6:11-12 (above) demonstrates this obsession clearly. Many Christians even today perpetuate a similar paranoia in their emphasis on Satan.

Every salvation religion of the day sought to fill this need for "armor" and reassurance against the hostile powers. Any savior god worth his or her salt had to possess power over such spirits and be willing to exercise it on their followers' behalf; Isis, for example, held a prominent role as just such a protector. But what of the great benefit Christ possessed over all the others? How are we to explain the failure of Ephesians and Colossians to point to dramatic, historical evidence which the Gospels record, evidence that Jesus did indeed possess and had demonstrated power over the demons and devices of the devil? For he had shown it even while he was on earth. The unclean spirits had surrendered to expulsion from the sick; they had cried for mercy. Even Jesus' apostles had been given the power to drive out devils. Yet these two letters have not a word to say about such healing exorcisms. Nor do they hold up Jesus' declaration (Mk. 3:21-7) that his purpose was to overthrow Satan and all his house.

Given the pagan preoccupation with evil spirits, the claim that Paul had felt no interest in Jesus' life and deeds is thoroughly discredited, for this aspect of Jesus' career would have been an immense asset to the appeal of his message, and of great interest to his listeners and converts. More broadly speaking, Christ in his incarnation would have enjoyed a dramatic advantage over his mythical Graeco-Roman rivals: for unlike them, he had recently been on earth in flesh and blood, seen by countless thousands, had dealt with evil forces first-hand, on humanity's own turf. In his personal dealings Jesus had shown compassion, tolerance, generosity, all those things men and women thirsted for in confronting a hostile, uncaring world. It is simply unthinkable that

Paul and the writers of such letters as Colossians and Ephesians would choose to remain silent on all these advantages of the human Jesus when presenting to their readers (gentile and Jew as well) their agent of salvation.

Philippians

▮ 86. - Philippians 1:6

Of one thing I am certain: the One who started the good work in you will bring it to completion by the Day of Christ Jesus. [NEB]

This statement in its few words sums up the picture of the early Christian movement. Communities of believers have sprung up in various centers, responding to the preaching of prophets like Paul, through the power of the Spirit sent from God. (The "One" in the verse above is God, as the sense of the sentence makes certain.) The concept that Jesus himself had begun anything is completely missing from the landscape of the epistles.

Whether Jesus had had any contact with the Philippians or not, whether he was long dead before the Philippians were converted or not, the image of the Son recently on earth as the force behind the origin and growth of the faith could not help but be present in the minds of preachers and believers alike. And yet it is consistently God who is presented as the mover and 'personality' behind the spread of Christianity. Christ Jesus may have provided the sacrifice, but as the above verse would indicate, there is an unmistakable sense throughout the epistles that he was not to put in an appearance on the earthly scene until the day he arrived from heaven to bring about the judgment and transformation of the world.

▮ — Philippians 3:10 - See "Top 20" #20

Colossians

▮ 87. - Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵*(The Son) is the image of the invisible God, his is the primacy over all created things.*
¹⁶*In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities and powers: the whole universe has been created through him and for him.* ¹⁷*And he exists before everything, and all things are held together in him.* ¹⁸*He is also the head of the church; and he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that he might come to have first place in everything.* ¹⁹*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,* ²⁰*and through him to reconcile to himself all things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. [NEB]*

Rivaled only by Hebrews 1:2-3, there is no more cosmic and exalted description of the Son to be found in the New Testament epistles than this 'christological hymn' of Colossians. The very image of God and bearing his fullness, pre-existent with God before creation, the instrument of that creation and serving as its ruler and sustaining power to preserve its very existence. But the hymn writer has left out any mention of the incarnation, the identity of the man who had been

this cosmic Son on earth, let alone anything he had done while in that human form. The writer, along with every other epistle author, has also neglected to explain how a mere man, a crucified criminal, could have been raised to such a lofty height, especially within a Jewish milieu, where separating God from all things human was an obsession. No defense of such an outlandish and blasphemous elevation of Jesus of Nazareth is ever offered.

Raised from the dead—but when and where is not stated, and its purpose is to have Christ achieve primacy in all things, a mythological concept in a spirit-world setting. As for being head of the church, Paul's genuine letters show that this is intended in a purely mystical sense. Why would all of these hymn writers (cf. Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Timothy 3:16, Ephesians 1:19-23) consistently remain silent on all aspects of the Son's earthly identity and activities?

The answer, of course, is that this language—most graphically here and in Hebrews 1—belongs to the primary philosophical concept of the age, the Son as the knowable image and emanation of a transcendent God and an intermediary force between deity and humanity, an entirely spiritual being. This concept is reflected in the Greek Logos and Jewish personified Wisdom. (See Supplementary Article No. 5: Tracing the Christian Lineage in Alexandria.) This is why the hymn describes the Son in terms of what he *is*, a present, eternal entity, and not with any sense of a human figure of the recent past upon whom this colossal theological superstructure has been heaped. (See also the section "A Cosmic Force" in my review of Burton Mack's book, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*)

▮ 88. - Colossians 1:25-27

²⁵I have become (the church's) servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, ²⁶the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷To them God has chosen to make known among the gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [NIV]

A passage similar to Ephesians 3:4-6 (#76) in which God reveals a long-hidden secret to apostles like Paul through revelation. As in the Ephesians case, the secret is narrowed, this time to the mystical, Pauline concept that Christ dwells in the believer, giving promise of future glory. Again the point must be made that even if we have no record of Christ having preached a specific doctrine like this (though some of Jesus' pronouncements in the Fourth Gospel come close in spirit), the tendency would have been to impute such a thing to him or to find pointers to it in the things he did say. Moreover, the stark past-present dichotomy—a secret long-hidden throughout past time, followed by its disclosure in the present, an idea found throughout the Pauline corpus—casts not a glance at any intervening career of the Son on earth, much less makes room for Jesus' role in revealing anything about himself.

The next passage also deals with God's revealed secret of Christ, and this time there is no narrowing of the mystery.

¶ 89. - Colossians 2:2-3

²*I want them . . . to come to the full wealth of conviction which understanding brings, and grasp God's secret. That secret is Christ himself; ³in him lie hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [NEB] (Compare also 4:3.)*

Here the secret long-hidden by God is not narrowed to a specific element. It is Christ himself who has been revealed in the present time. No thought is expressed that the Son had been revealed by the Son himself, recently incarnated. And the dwelling of God's wisdom and knowledge within the Son is expressed in the present tense, when we might expect to find a past tense, expressing the natural thought that such things had dwelled in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, the present implies a spiritual, eternal being, the intermediary Son of contemporary philosophy.

¶ 90. - Colossians 2:8-10

⁸*Do not let your mind be captured by hollow and delusive speculations, based on traditions of man (man-made teachings) and centered on the elemental spirits of the world and not on Christ. ⁹For it is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in him you have been brought to completion. ¹⁰Every power and authority in the universe is subject to him as Head. [NEB]*

As in the previous passage, God is found in Christ in the present and not in the past in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And if, as many judge (see Bauer's Lexicon), the "elemental spirits" (*stoicheia*) of verse 8 refers to the divine entities which the ancients believed inhabited the heavenly bodies and certain aspects of the physical world, where is the contrast we should expect the writer to make between such spiritual entities and Christ? Namely, that the latter had taken on humanity and lived a life on earth.

In verse 10 the writer, like the writer of Ephesians (6:12, #85), fails to mention Jesus' ministry in which as miracle-worker and exorcist he demonstrated for all to see that he did indeed have power over the evil spirits. Such power is referred to in verse 15: "There (on the cross) Christ stripped the demonic rulers and authorities of their power over him, and in his own triumph made a public show of them." [Translator's New Testament; whether Christ or God is to be considered the subject of this sentence is uncertain.] But it is a power clearly exercised in the spiritual dimension, supporting the view that the entire crucifixion took place in the spirit realm.

¶ 91. - Colossians 2:11

In him also you were circumcised, not in a physical sense, but by being divested of the lower nature; this is Christ's way of circumcision. [NEB]

Both Nativity stories (Matthew and Luke) are probably products of the early 2nd century, but if Jesus had lived, there would of course have been the automatic expectation that eight days after his birth he had been circumcised, like all Jewish males. Thus the words of this verse might well have confused those readers who always assumed that "physically" was precisely the way Jesus was circumcised.

Though the point may at first glance seem fatuous, it actually bears some consideration. For if the Pauline outlook advocated the rejection of the circumcision requirement for gentiles ("There is no such thing as Jew or Greek . . .") in favor of being "in Christ Jesus," one might expect that some accommodation would have to be made for the physical discrepancy between the believer and the historical Jesus. At the very least, we would not expect a Pauline writer to come up with a metaphor which not only ignored the discrepancy, but implied that it did not exist.

¶ 92. - Colossians 3:2-4

²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your [new] life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, you also will be revealed with him in glory. [NASB]

A passage which vividly conveys the sense that Christ had never been seen by anyone, had never been to earth. The believer's true destiny, his new life, is "hidden" along with Christ who dwells with God. Both are to "be revealed" when Christ arrives from heaven. In the orthodox interpretation, this would surely be an odd choice of word—*phaneroo*: reveal oneself or be revealed, become visible, appear, usually entailing the manifestation or the making known of something not hitherto known or experienced. Since the same verb is used in both halves of verse 3—the 'revealing' of Christ and the 'revealing' of the believer's true life—one can assume they have a parallel meaning. Since the believer's destined new life is something which has not yet put in an appearance, the implication is that Christ himself has yet to do so as well.

If Christ had recently been on earth and left it, what writer would not simply have said the equivalent of "return" or "come back," some phrase which was cognizant of the fact that this would be a second coming? Ironically, most Lexicons specify that one definition of this verb is its reference to Christ's Second Advent, but the examples given are of passages like this one in the epistles, where such a meaning is read into the word based on Gospel preconceptions. In actual fact, none of the quoted passages (here in Col. 3:4, 1 Pet. 5:4, 1 Jn 2:28 & 3:2—though the latter refer to God) contain any suggestion of a previous Advent, making such a definition circular and without foundation.

While *phaneroo* can mean to 'put in an appearance,' it is also one of several 'revelation' words used throughout the epistles that clearly speak of the 'making known' of Christ in the present time (eg, 1 Peter 1:20) which, if one sets aside Gospel preconceptions, tell us that this is a revelation of knowledge about the Son and Savior in a spiritual way, with no physical or visible presence, past or present, involved.

¶ 93. - Colossians 3:9-10

⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. [NIV]

Another passage suggesting Jesus' teaching that one must be born anew (e.g., John 3:3), yet the writer makes no mention of it. We might also note that the "image" of Christ must not be too strong in the writer's mind for him to pass up having the reader put on the image of Jesus, rather than God.

¶ 94. - Colossians 3:12-14

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. [NIV]

What perversity could have led all the epistle writers to speak in terms of the qualities Jesus was reputed to have possessed on earth, to speak of the teachings he was recorded to have spoken, and yet consistently fail to make even a passing attribution of such things to him?

Does "the Lord" in verse 13 refer to God or to Christ? The *Expositor's Greek Testament* observes that "there is no reason for referring *kurios* to God, since Jesus when on earth forgave sins." But that is reading the Gospels into it, and in fact here the term is almost certainly a reference to God. Not only has the writer just spoken of God in the preceding verse, he speaks of God forgiving the readers' sins in 2:13. Even 1:14 has God doing the forgiving of sins "in the Son," the same idea as that expressed in Ephesians 4:32. One might also point out that since Jesus on no occasion forgave the sins of the Colossians, the writer would not have tended to express it thus. Jesus' sacrifice made forgiveness possible, but its source was God.

1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy And Titus

1 Thessalonians

¶ — 1 Thessalonians 2:2 - See "Top 20" #3

¶ 95. - 1 Thessalonians 2:4

But God has approved us as fit to be entrusted with the Gospel . . .

In the face of those who could claim that Jesus himself had appointed them to spread the gospel (as in Mt. 28:19), one would think that Paul would be anxious to appeal to his own appointment by Jesus, even if in a vision. Acts has the risen Jesus appear to Paul not only on the road to Damascus, but in the Temple (22:17-21), where he specifically instructs Paul: "Go, for I am sending you far away to the Gentiles." Yet Paul consistently (see #40: 1 Corinthians 1:1) speaks of his call to preach as one from God, and never gives any hint of the Damascus road legend found in Acts.

Quite apart from the contradiction with Acts, if Jesus were a force who had recently been on earth, choosing and sending out apostles to spread the gospel, one would expect a strong sense in the Pauline epistles that Jesus himself is the director of the movement and the one who does the calling, whether in the past in flesh or now in spirit. Paul conveys no sense of this whatever, either in relation to his own mission or that of others.

¶ 96. - 1 Thessalonians 2:12-13

¹². . . to live lives worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. ¹³This is why we thank God continually, because when we handed on God's message, you received it, not as the word of men, but as what it truly is, the very word of God at work in you who hold the faith.
[NEB]

Following on the previous item, we can see once again just how pervasive is Paul's focus on God as the figure to whom he and the early Christian movement relate. Jesus is scarcely on the radar screen. As a mental experiment, try substituting the word "Jesus" everywhere the word "God" appears in the above quote, and ask yourself if that version does not convey the thinking and mode of expression we would expect to find in the early Christian record.

[The Verses Immediately Following These (14-16) Abruptly Switch To That Focus On Jesus, For This Is The Passage Which Has Been Judged By Most Liberal Scholars Today To Be A Later Insertion. It Speaks Of The Jews "Who Killed The Lord Jesus" And Contains A Reference To What Is Obviously The Destruction Of Jerusalem, Which Happened Many Years After Paul Would Have Penned This Letter. (See My Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus? For A Full Examination Of This Passage.) Exactly Where The Insertion Starts Is Uncertain. Some Include Verse 14 In The Interpolation, Others Begin It Only At Verse 15. This Passage Is Also Addressed In The Appendix.]

¶ 97. - 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8

⁷*For God called us to holiness, not to impurity.* ⁸*Anyone therefore who flouts these rules is flouting not man, but God who bestows upon you his Holy Spirit. [NEB]*

Paul again speaks of God calling the believer to a life of holiness, where we might expect Jesus' own ministry to have been regarded as doing just that. Verse 8 reminds us (and ought to have reminded Paul) of Jesus' own saying in Luke 10:16: "Whoever rejects me, rejects the one who sent me." In fact, the parallel demonstrates how moral admonitions that were earlier set in the context of God's will and teaching, are in the Gospels transferred to the figure of Jesus. That principle is even more evident in the following verse (next item, in "Top 20"), in which Paul declares that "you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."

¶ — 1 Thessalonians 4:9 - See "Top 20" #4

¶ 98. - 1 Thessalonians 4:14

We believe that Jesus died and rose again. [NEB, NIV]

A plain statement by Paul that both the death and the rising of Jesus are matters of faith, not historical events that were witnessed and remembered. As such, it fits Paul's declaration of his basic gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, that Jesus had died, was buried and raised, all of it derived from the scriptures (*kata tas graphas*) through revelation (the verb *paralambano* in verse 3), not from historical tradition. These "events" took place in myth, as revealed by scripture, not on earth in recent history. As such, they were like the salvation myths of the other savior gods of the time. See my Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel.

¶ 99. - 1 Thessalonians 5:2

For you know perfectly well that the Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. One of Jesus' most memorable sayings about the anticipated End-time, as found in Matthew 24:43 and Luke 21:34 (from Q), uses the 'coming of the thief in the night' image in relation to the Son of Man. Despite Paul's profound focus on the imminent End throughout his letters, he shows no knowledge of any saying of Jesus on the subject, or even that Jesus had been an apocalyptic prophet (as in Mark 13). Nor does he ever use the term Son of Man, in relation to Jesus or any other context. Other epistle writers show the same ignorance.

[It Is Anomalies Like This Which Help Discredit The Claim That Some Or All Of The Gospels Were Written Before The Jewish War, Even In The 40s Or 50s. If Such Writings Were Indeed Contemporaneous With Paul, Recording Language And Traditions That Were Circulating At The Time About Jesus' Teachings And Activities, It Becomes Difficult To Comprehend How Paul Could Have Been Ignorant Of Them Or Chosen To Ignore Them. Rather, The Son Of Man, To Judge By All The Documents In Which He Appears, Seems To Have Been A Phenomenon Restricted To The Second Half Of The 1st Century, Perhaps Even Post-Jewish War, A Peculiar Reading And Application Of The Phrase In Daniel 7 Which Had A Brief Moment Of Popularity In Certain Christian And Jewish Circles And Died Out By The End Of The Century.]

¶ 100. - 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

¹⁴*You must live at peace among yourselves. And we would urge you, brothers, to admonish the careless, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, and to be very patient with them all.*

¹⁵*See to it that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but always aim at doing the best you can for each other and for all men. [NEB]*

Passages like this are often claimed by scholars to contain "echoes" of Jesus' teachings. And so they do. What they do not contain is any suggestion that such things are attributed to him by the early Christians. Mark 9:50 has Jesus say: "Be at peace with one another." Verse 15 above echoes Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:39): "Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you." So many epistle passages such as this one inevitably conjure up Gospel scenes, images of the wandering sage, so that we cannot help but surround them in our own reading with the atmosphere of the preaching Jesus. And yet not one of these early writers is similarly affected, not even to the extent of giving us a simple "as Jesus himself taught."

2 Thessalonians

¶ 101. - 2 Thessalonians 1:7

. . . when our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed [at the revelation of, apokalupsei] from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire.

Another example of the impression created by all references to the anticipated arrival of the divine Christ from heaven. Not only is there no suggestion that he has recently been here already, the language used is consistently that of revelation, an 'uncovering' of that (namely, Jesus Christ himself) which has previously been hidden, unknown and unseen. (See "Top 20" #17: 1 Corinthians 1:7-8.)

1 Timothy

¶ 102. - 1 Timothy 1:10-11 (Cf. 6:3, 2 Timothy 1:13, 4:3, Titus 1:9, 2:1)

¹⁰*. . . and whatever else is contrary to the wholesome teaching which conforms with the gospel entrusted to me, ¹¹the gospel which tells of the glory of God in his eternal felicity. NASB/NEB]*

In six places in the Pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), the writer uses the phrase "wholesome (or sound) teachings," referring to the moral behavior he is enjoining upon the readers. In five of these, there is no indication as to where such teaching comes from. In fact, here on its first appearance the writer, speaking as Paul, says that such teaching is part of the gospel entrusted to him, something which Paul has regularly told us came from God through revelation. Here, too, he intimates that the gospel is God's message about his own plans and the benefits he is bestowing on the world at the present time (cf. Titus 2:11).

The missing thought is obvious: that it was Jesus himself, when on earth, who was the source of this teaching. Thus, in the one passage where such an idea actually appears, it jumps out at us. Moreover, it does so in a way that seems suspicious. 1 Timothy 6:3 reads:

If anyone is teaching otherwise, and will not give his mind to wholesome precepts—those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. [NEB/NIV] The phrase between the dashes looks very much like a later scribal notation made in the margin and subsequently inserted into the body. The word "those" (*tois*) is redundant and would not likely have been written if part of the original text. The phrase also carelessly fails to cover the succeeding thought, "and to godly teaching," which we would expect to be included in the things the original writer would have wanted to attribute to Jesus.

In any case, if the phrase in question was a part of the original text, it need imply no more than that the "teaching" is considered to be revealed directly from the spiritual Christ in heaven, in much the same sense as Paul's "words of the Lord" are now regarded.

¶ 103. - 1 Timothy 2:8

It is my desire, therefore, that everywhere prayers be said by the men of the congregation who shall lift up their hands with a pure intention, excluding angry or quarrelsome thoughts. [NEB]

To say prayers without anger toward one's neighbor: clearly, the writer is unaware of Jesus' own admonitions about such a situation, as in Mark 11:25: "And when you stand praying, if you have a grievance against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you the wrongs you have done." Compare also Matthew 5:23-4.

¶ 104. - 1 Timothy 3:16

This is one of the christological hymns imbedded in the Pauline letters, poetic pieces of liturgy that were probably the product of the earliest groups of Christian believers in the divine Son. The writer introduces it with these words: "And great beyond all question is the mystery of our religion:"

*He who was manifested in flesh,
Vindicated in [or by] the Spirit,
Was seen by angels;
Was proclaimed among the nations,
Believed in throughout the world,
Taken up in glory. [NASB/NEB]*

Here, the starting point for the hymnist is the divine Son in heaven, one who descended and was exalted back to heaven in glory. Another reflection of the Descending-Ascending redeemer motif found also in Philippians 2:6-11. Not only is there no specific reference to a life on earth, there is no glimmer of the character of Jesus of Nazareth. The opening phrase may refer to a revelation of the Son to or in "the sphere of the flesh" (see my discussion of Romans 1:3 in Article No. 8, Christ As "Man", based on C.K. Barrett's suggested translation of *kata sarka*). The deity in this hymn was seen by angels, but apparently not by humans. He was proclaimed among the nations, but apparently did no proclaiming himself. Nor is there any sign of the physical resurrection from the tomb, a dramatic moment that should surely not have been passed over, and which should have been seen as a greater "mystery" than any other. The term "mystery" itself conveys, and is usually applied to, something which is the object of revelation, an interpretation of sacred texts, or a mystical understanding.

¶ 105. 1 Timothy 4:1

The Spirit says expressly that in after times some will desert from the faith and give their minds to subversive doctrines inspired by devils . . . [NEB]

By the time we reach the period of the Pastoral epistles (early 2nd century), Christians were beginning to hedge on predictions that the End was near, and allow for the possibility that the "appearance" of Christ Jesus was not just around the corner. But predictions about the nature and signs of the End-time are a recurring theme in almost all the New Testament epistles, as in this verse of 1 Timothy.

The Gospels indicate that an important element of Jesus' preaching was apocalyptic: describing and predicting the coming end (or transformation) of the world. Even had he not said much, or even anything, on the subject, the preoccupation of Christian communities with this dramatic looming event would inevitably have led to imputing to Jesus many sayings and predictions on the matter. (The second layer of Q is generally interpreted on this principle.)

And yet the writer of 1 Timothy attributes the prediction that false prophets will seduce many to abandon the true doctrine, not to Jesus but to the Spirit sent from God, again showing that even in the early 2nd century, Christian communities still functioned by revelation and had no concept of apostolic tradition, the idea of teachings passed on through a chain of transmission ultimately going back to Jesus himself. There is no mention here that Jesus himself had predicted this very thing. Mark 13:22-3, in the midst of a great apocalyptic description of what will come to pass, has Jesus say: "Imposters will come claiming to be Messiahs or prophets, and they will produce signs and wonders to mislead God's chosen. But you be on your guard; I have forewarned you of it all." To a man, the epistle writers have forgotten such words and predictions, for never do they attribute a single apocalyptic saying to an historical preaching Jesus. (Cf. Jude 17, 2 Peter 2:1, 3:2.)

¶ 106. - 1 Timothy 4:4

For everything that God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected when it is taken with thanksgiving . . .

The writer is here referring in part to food, having condemned (in the previous verse) those who forbid the eating of certain foods. This, according to the Gospels, was one of Jesus' most important reforms, the suspension of the oppressive dietary laws of Judaism. Paul himself and the writer of the epistle of Barnabas (chapter 10) are others who are very concerned with abandoning or discrediting those dietary laws, yet not one of these letter writers appeals to Jesus' own teaching on the matter, as 'recorded' in a passage like Mark 7:18: " 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? . . . ' Thus, he declared all foods clean."

¶ 107. - 1 Timothy 4:10

For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. [NASB]

A particularly glaring example of the pervasive theocentric focus of early Christian expression. God is the center of their hopes, their devotion, their thanks. The Savior title is applied as much to him as to Christ. In a movement supposedly begun in response to a human Jesus and incarnated Son, this degree of theocentricity seems off-kilter. But when we view early Christianity as a faith system in which it is God who has revealed the existence and role of a hitherto unknown Son whose salvific acts have taken place in the mythical world, the focus on God and the balance between the two as Savior figures falls into place.

¶ 108. - 1 Timothy 5:18

For Scripture says: 'A threshing ox shall not be muzzled'; and 'the worker deserves his wages.' On the surface, we have here a saying from scripture (Deuteronomy 25:4), and a saying of the Gospel Jesus (Luke 10:7). And yet, the wording implies that the second quotation is also from scripture, a term which is not likely to have been applied to the Gospel of Luke this early in the second century, when the Pastorals were written. If, as most claim, the writer is not identifying the second quote as scriptural but as a saying of Jesus, why does he not specify that? Why does he identify the source of the first quotation and leave out the proper attribution of the second? More than likely, the second is taken from some writing now lost, and like so much else, ended up in Jesus' mouth under the pen of the evangelists.

J. C. O'Neill (*The Theology of Acts*, p.9, n.1) comments: "The quotation of the saying, 'The labourer deserves his wages' in 1 Tim. 5:18 may be taken from Luke 10:7, but it is strange that the one saying of Jesus to be quoted in the Pastorals, and to be quoted as Scripture, should look so much like a common saying put into the Lord's mouth in Luke."

¶ 109. - 1 Timothy 6:14-15

I charge you to obey your orders irreproachably and without fault until our Lord Jesus Christ appears. That appearance God will bring to pass in his own good time, God who in eternal felicity alone holds sway. [NEB]

This is another passage looking forward to an appearance by Christ which lacks any sense that he had appeared before. But there is also a certain lack of conviction that Jesus is his own agent, that he has a separate character and ability to act independent of God.

I have remarked before on the curious and pervasive theocentricity of the epistles, something we should not expect if the movement began as an explosive reaction to a charismatic human man. Yet it is undeniable that early Christian writers seem never to present their Jesus as a strong, independent figure, clearly distinct from God. Often God and Jesus are spoken of in the same breath, like two sides of a single coin (e.g., Jude 4). Both are viewed as divine, heavenly beings. Things are done by God through Jesus, rather than spoken of as done directly by Jesus himself. As noted above, it is frequently God who is Savior, a title we would tend to think of as reserved for Jesus.

Scholars call this a "fluid application." In discussing certain passages in the epistles, they regularly disagree over who is meant by a given reference, such as the title "Lord." Is it Jesus or God? Is Jesus actually called "God" in a number of places (e.g., Romans 9:5 and Titus 2:13)? Are commandments said to come from God or from Christ? (This is a source of confusion in 1 John.) The functions of Father and Son do not seem to be clearly separated yet. There even seem to be passages where *God* is said to have suffered, an idea which proved a source of horror to later 2nd century Christians and declared heretical.

This ambiguity, the blurring of roles and personalities between Jesus and God which scholars often remark on, is understandable once one accepts that Jesus is not a distinct historical person whom people had experienced and remembered, but a theoretical entity, something one has derived from scripture under the influence of ideas current in religious philosophy. He is an emanation of God, an intermediary force, part of the workings of Divinity, all of it located in the supernatural realm. This manifestation of God is in the process of being defined, being clarified in the minds of writers like Paul. Once we get to the era of the Gospels, which have turned this vague intermediary divine Christ-force into an historical man, Christian writers have a flesh and blood Jesus before their eyes, and they no longer have a problem in referring to him in a distinct manner, allotting to him all the powers and personality of a concrete figure.

¶ 110. - 1 Timothy 6:16

He [God] alone possesses immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light. No man has ever seen or ever can see him. [NEB]

Again, if Jesus had been a man on earth, with his own character and personality and life history, and had been given the lofty status of divinity such as we find in passages like Colossians 1:15-20, then he too would have been regarded as a distinct entity from God and as possessing his own immortality. And if Jesus had been a man recently on earth, one who had in fact seen and come from God, it does not seem likely that the writer would have made the second statement above, at least not without some qualification.

2 Timothy

¶ 111. - 2 Timothy 1:9-10

. . . in the strength that comes from God. ⁹It is he who brought us salvation and called us to a dedicated life, not for any merit of ours but of his own purpose and his own grace, which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, ¹⁰but has now at length been brought fully into view by the appearance (on earth) of our Savior Jesus Christ. For he has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. [NEB]

Once again, the writer focuses on God as the agent of salvation, not Jesus. This passage is extremely important from a number of points of view, and I deal with it extensively in my book. Let me quote a couple of paragraphs from that discussion:

"First of all, the NEB's gratuitous 'on earth' does not appear in the Greek. Then note the phrase (verse 10) '...brought fully into view by the appearance of . . .' This is actually two revelation words, the verb *phaneroo* and the noun *epiphaneia*. The latter can signify the intervention or manifestation of a god, with no human incarnation involved. What the sentence is really saying,

then, is that God's purpose and grace have been revealed by the revelation of the Savior Jesus Christ. No life on earth there.

"Then consider what follows. The 'he' of the last sentence refers to the Savior. But what has this Savior done? He has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light (yet another revelation word)—how?—*through the gospel*. The writer does not say that Christ at his 'appearance' has overcome death and brought immortal life through his own deeds, performed during his sojourn on earth. Instead, these things were accomplished 'through the gospel.' " That gospel is the one Paul preaches, as verse 11 goes on to make clear, a gospel he derived from the scriptures.

The discussion in the book then goes on to analyze the key phrase "granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity," demonstrating that the meaning of "from all eternity" (*pro chronon aionion*) places Christ's redeeming act in a higher, timeless Platonic dimension. (See also Part Two of the Main Articles: Who Was Christ Jesus?)

¶ 112. - 2 Timothy 3:14-15

¹⁴You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom (tison, plural) you have learned them; ¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [NASB]

The writer has been speaking of living "a godly life as Christians," and here he goes on to allude to the source of that morality. He refers to unnamed teachers or community leaders from whom his readers have learned these things; he refers to the scriptures which contain words of wisdom about what must be believed and followed to gain salvation. But he cannot bring himself to mention Jesus himself as the ultimate source of any of these teachings. This is clearly not a question of whether there is a "need" to tell the readers what they already know; in fact he tells them what they already know in the things he *does* say. Rather, this profound silence on any mention of Jesus the teacher, the source of Christian ethics and enlightenment, can only lead to one conclusion.

Titus

¶ — Titus 1:2-3 - See "Top 20" #7

¶ 113. - Titus 2:11-13

¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. [NASB/NIV]

How does the writer, speaking as Paul, characterize the present time when salvation has arrived? What Christian would not say that this great turning point in history was marked by the advent of

Christ on earth, teaching and performing his acts of salvation? Instead, he can only speak of it in terms of "the grace of God dawning upon the world" (to use the NEB's poetic translation).

Is this a metaphorical reference to Jesus himself? Some commentators would like to suggest so, though this seems an interpretation born of desperation. And all translations of the succeeding phrase render the idea in the neuter: "*It* teaches us . . ." Moreover, the rest of the passage above creates a jarring anomaly. The grace of God has taught us how to live, *while we wait* for the appearance of the Savior. If we were to substitute for the grace of God the idea of Jesus working on earth, teaching how to live (and how could such an image *not* be in the writer's mind?), his return to the similar idea of coming to earth after the interim waiting period would inevitably require an expression of the concept of "return," of coming back. We never get such an expression. Rather, the whole atmosphere of these verses is that the anticipated appearance of the Savior on earth will be his first time here.

God calls and reveals, apostles preach, people believe and wait, the Savior comes. Such was the pattern of the early Christian faith movement—until the Gospels came along.

▮ 114. - Titus 3:4-6

⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior dawned upon the world, then, not for any good deeds of our own, but because he was merciful, ⁵he saved us through the water of rebirth and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom [i.e., the Holy Spirit] he [God] poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. [NEB/NIV]

Once again, as in Titus 2:11, the present time is characterized as the "dawning upon the world of the kindness and love of God, not the incarnation of Jesus bestowing such things in his own right and person. How has God "saved" in the present time? Through the baptismal rite and the power of the Spirit, two things 'Paul' focuses on as features of the early Christian apostolic movement: sacrament and revelation. The final verse might be claimed to refer to Jesus' own career as the channel of that Spirit. But not only would this be a rather restrictive characterization of what Jesus had done on earth, the thought accords much better with the interpretation of Paul's Jesus Christ as a spiritual force now active in the world, serving as a channel through which God makes himself known and bestows his benefits. (For a fuller discussion of that ubiquitous Pauline phrase "in, or through, Christ" see Part Two of the Main Articles: Who Was Christ Jesus?)

The Epistle To The Hebrews

¶ 115. - Hebrews 1:1-3

¹When in former times God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets. ²But in this the final age he has spoken to us through the Son

whom he has made heir to the whole universe, and through whom he created all orders of existence: ³the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendor and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by his word of power.

When he had brought about the purgation of sins, he took his seat at the right hand of Majesty on high . . . [NEB]

Unlike many New Testament epistles, Hebrews cannot be spoken of as an "occasional writing," written 'off the cuff.' Rather, it is a carefully thought-out theological treatise, designed to enlighten and encourage the community of which the writer is a part, apparently in the face of difficulties and the threat of members losing heart and fervor. Accordingly, we should have every right to expect that the essentials of the community's faith would be reflected in this epistle, not the least of which would be an identification of the object of that faith with the historical man presumed to lie at its root. We should also expect—and certainly so in a work of this length—a fair amount of 'biographical' reference to incidents, teachings, and background such as we find in the Gospels, reflecting the life and deeds of the man on whom the epistle writer and readers have founded their community and theology.

Whether in fact we find such things will be seen as we go along. I have broken up the first three verses of the epistle's opening, the better to focus on the points to be made.

The first section speaks of the Son 'who has spoken to us' in this final age. Yet in the entire epistle there is not one saying of Jesus on earth offered to the readers, nor even a reference to him as a teacher. We will see that in a few places the writer would have had a perfect occasion to offer a Gospel or Gospel-like saying to illustrate the point he is making. Yet in all cases, and in many other places throughout the epistle, the "voice" of the Son is entirely from the Jewish scriptures, as though the Son is regarded as a spiritual force who communicates with the world through the sacred writings. This is a feature we find in other early Christian documents, such as 1 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas.

The opening verses of Hebrews ranks with the hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 as the most exalted description of "the Son" found in the early Christian documents. This cosmic being, through whom God created the world and maintains its continued existence, is spoken of as constituting his very image, embodying his very nature, reflecting his divine splendor. The Son is an emanation of God himself, as close to the ultimate God as one can get and still be seen as a distinct entity. As such, he falls into the same category as the intermediary Logos of Platonic philosophy, similar to what we find in Philo of Alexandria; and he is similar if not identical to contemporary portrayals of personified Wisdom, that communicating aspect of God in Jewish wisdom tradition, such as we find in Proverbs, Sirach, and especially the Alexandrian Hellenistic-Jewish document known as the Wisdom of Solomon.

While wondering how Jews could possibly have performed such a blasphemous elevation on a human man—a crucified criminal, in the public eye—we have to ask why a description of the Son would not have included any reference to his human identity and career on earth. This will be particularly perplexing when we get to the next item. But here, in verse 3, the cosmic

dimensions in which the Son is portrayed almost demand a justification for creating such a product out of a human man. And in the latter part of the verse, his entire life's work seems to be relegated to a single phrase: "when he had brought about the purgation of sins." Is this a reference, at least, to Calvary? In chapters 8 and 9, the writer's discussion of Christ's sacrifice, which brought about that purgation, shows that it is not, but is rather an act which Jesus as High Priest is presented as conducting entirely within the heavenly sanctuary, in the upper spiritual world.

¶ 116. - Hebrews 1:4-14

⁴*So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.*

⁵*For to which of the angels did God ever say: "You are my Son, today I have become your father . . ." (continued below) [NIV]*

With this, the author begins an extended argument to prove that the Son is superior to the angels. That proof is a quotation of various scriptural passages, some regarded as the voice of God speaking to or about his Son, others speaking about the angels, the sentiments of the former being judged more exalted. Yet not a single element of the Son's earthly existence is placed on the table in support of that argument. The fact of the resurrection itself should have blown the competition out of the water. The Son's human incarnation and his career in flesh would surely have rendered the scriptural argument he appeals to almost insignificant.

We should note that this writer can have no tradition about Jesus' baptism as presented in the Gospels, when the voice of God out of heaven was reputed to have spoken the above words from Psalm 2:7, acknowledging Jesus as his Son. His quotation of this verse makes no mention of the scene by the Jordan.

[Some Commentators Have Wondered Why The Writer Introduces The Contrast Of Christ With The Angels. Why Is He So Concerned With Proving Christ's Superiority? A Movement Founded On The Career Of Jesus Of Nazareth As The Incarnated Son Of God And His Reputed Rising From The Grave Could Hardly Fail To Envision Him As 'Higher Than The Angels.' On The Other Hand, If All These Entities Are Elements Of The Heavenly World And Its Workings, And Knowledge About Them Is Derived From Scripture, Recourse To Scripture Would Be Necessary To Prove The Son's Superiority To The Angels.

The Issue Behind This Superiority Of The Son Is Contained In The Thought Of Verse 2: That God's Old Way Of Speaking Through The Prophets Has Now Been Supplanted By A New One: The Voice Of The Son Speaking Through Scripture—Which Is To Say, The Way This Sectarian Group (And The Early Christian Movement As A Whole) Has Itself Interpreted Scripture And Its Belief In The Newly Discovered Son. Since The Angels Were Associated With God's Revelation In The Past, The Medium Of The New Revelation, Namely The Perceived Spiritual Son Speaking And Inspiring The Sect Through The Sacred Writings, Has To Be Proven To Be Superior To The Old. But If The Son Had Been On Earth, Teaching And Working Miracles, If He Had Been Crucified As A Sacrifice And Resurrected From His Tomb, There Would No Question In Anyone's Mind Of The Superiority Of This New Medium, And Thus Any Comparison With The Angels (And Certainly One Based On Scripture) Would Be Completely Unnecessary.

If The Situation Were That The Readers Were In Danger Of Abandoning Belief That Jesus Of Nazareth Was In Fact The Son Of God, Then The Writer Would Fashion His Arguments Along Such Lines—Which He Does Not. (We Find A Similar Situation In 1 John, Where Commentators Suggest That The Opponents In Chapter 2 Are In Some Way Denying Something About Jesus Of Nazareth, Yet The Writer There Fashions No Arguments Around Such A Figure, Failing, In Fact, To Mention Him At All.)]

. . . ⁶ *Again, when he presents [the verb eisago] the first-born to the world [oikumenen], he says: "Let all the angels of God pay him homage." . . . [NEB]*

Some claim that the use of the word "*oikumene*" supports a human incarnation. But the thought does not relate to an earthly scene. Regardless of how this word is used in other, or even the usual, contexts, here it is the venue of a heavenly event. One of the meanings of the verb *eisago* is to "introduce," and so I prefer the NEB's translation of this verse as: "when he presents the firstborn to the world." "First-born" is a Philonic-style description of a Logos-like entity, the first product or emanation from God. And the word *oikumene* cannot have the narrow meaning of "earth" or "inhabited world" here, but must mean something like "universe" or "cosmos," since God is presenting his firstborn to the angels, not to humans. (The angels are hardly considered inhabitants of the Roman empire.) The 'time' of that scene is also not recent history, since it is tied to a verse from scripture (Deut. 32:43 LXX), as though the latter illustrates the occasion of God's presentation of his Son.

Note that the verb here is in the present tense, which is a common way early Christian writers have of offering passages from scripture. This is best interpreted as representing the concept of a timeless present, or a 'mythical present.' (We will look at an even more telling example of this in 10:5.) Scripture is a window onto that heavenly world in which the Son lives and acts.

This passage concludes with the thought: "To which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make thy enemies thy footstool'? What are they all [i.e., the angels] but ministrant spirits, sent out to serve, for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" But to which angels did he give incarnation? Was the Son not 'sent out' in a way more dramatic than that of any angel, for the sake of the saved? One would not know it from this epistle.

¶ 117. - Hebrews 2:1-4

¹*Thus we are bound to pay all the more heed to what we have been told, for fear of drifting from our course.* ²*For if the word spoken through angels had such force that any transgression or disobedience met with due retribution,* ³*what escape can there be for us if we ignore a deliverance [salvation] so great? For this deliverance was first announced through the (lips of the) Lord (himself); those who heard (him) confirmed it to us,* ⁴*and God (added his) testimony by signs, by miracles, by manifold works of power, and by distributing the gifts of the Holy Spirit at his own will. [NEB]*

I have chosen the NEB translation here to illustrate once again how ideas determined by the Gospel story (the words in round brackets above) can be introduced, at times blatantly, into the thought of the epistles. In verse 3, no words conveying the NEB's idea of the Lord's own "lips" are present, or of hearing "him," implying the preaching Jesus. As mentioned earlier, no words of such a preaching Jesus are to be found in this epistle, and the idea in verse 1, that the community must heed what it has been told, is evidently not to include the sayings and teachings of Jesus

himself, which are never referred to. (We shall see that they are conspicuously absent at a few points later in the epistle.)

This passage has been examined in detail in my Article No. 7: Transfigured On the Holy Mountain: The Beginnings of Christianity. Here I will point out that the occasion being described has all the marks of a revelatory experience which lay at the community's inception. Those who experienced that revelation, one which seemed to convey God's guarantee of salvation, passed on their convictions to others. The fact that the writer (verse 4) mentions miracles *by God* which either accompanied the revelation or subsequently verified it (the meaning is not clear), rather than miracles *of Jesus* which in the Gospels are designed to validate his teachings, indicates that he has no Gospel tradition in mind here.

¶ 118. - Hebrews 2:11-13

¹¹ . . . For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² when he says, "I will proclaim thy name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing thy praise." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me." [NASB/NEB] The above quotations are from the biblical Psalms (22:22) and Isaiah 8:17 and 18. They are used to illustrate the contention that the Son is not ashamed to call believers his brothers. Yet more than one commentator has wondered why the writer did not draw on any of Jesus' sayings on the subject as recorded in the Gospels. Luke 8:21, "My brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it," or Mark 3:35, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother," would have served his purposes well, and would moreover have been an example of the voice of the Son who "speaks in this final age." Matthew 25:40 would have served: "Anything you did for one of my brothers . . . you did for me." Or even John 20:17: "Go to my brothers and tell them that I am now ascending to my Father."

In this passage, we again encounter that characteristic use of the present-tense form. The Son is "saying" these Old Testament quotations, as though the voice of the Son is heard within scripture. If Jesus had been a human figure, whose words and deeds were well remembered from recent history, it is difficult to envision the kind of mindset which would have translated him into this timeless, mystical entity embodied solely within the sacred writings.

[The Passage Surrounding This Quotation Contains Various References To The Idea Of Christ's "Flesh" And "Blood" And His Sharing Of Characteristics With The Children/Believers Mentioned In The Above Verses. As Close As He Might Seem To Come, The Writer Still Never Steps Over The Line And Makes A Direct And Unmistakable Reference To An Earthly Life, And In Fact There Are Telltale Features Here That Place Such Language Within A Mythical, Paradigmatic Setting Of The Relationship Between The Higher World Divinity And His Material World Human Counterpart. Those Aspects, In Regard To This Passage And Others, Have Been Discussed In Other Articles On The Site And Will Be Reexamined In The Appendix: 20 Arguable References To A Human Jesus In The New Testament Epistles.]

¶ 119. - Hebrews 2:14-15

¹⁴ . . . and so he too shared ours [flesh and blood], so that through death he might break the power of him who had death at his command, that is, the devil; ¹⁵ and might liberate those who, through fear of death, had all their lifetime been in servitude. [NEB]

Jean Héring (*Hebrews*, p.xi) refers to this epistle as an "enigma" for its failure to mention the resurrection of Jesus. It is notably missing in this passage. What, after all, does the standard picture of Jesus' conquest of death consist of? It focuses on his resurrection out of that state, back to flesh and appearing to his followers. Yet here the writer can speak of "breaking the power of death" and point only to the death itself as bringing this about. Even in regard to that death, we shall see that the writer's focus on Jesus' redemptive act is not at all on the business of dying (something he never locates in a specific time and place, nor does he discuss its component elements or meaning), but on his actions as High Priest in heaven's sanctuary, bringing his blood to the spiritual altar as a sacrifice to God, in a counterpart manner to the offering of the Day of Atonement ritual in the earthly Temple (or its Sinai precedent).

[The Only Conceivable Allusion To The Resurrection Is Found In 13:20, In A Passage Which In Any Case Has Been Questioned As Authentic To The Original Epistle: "May The God Of Peace, Who Brought Up From The Dead Our Lord Jesus, The Great Shepherd Of The Sheep . . ." Here The Greek Verb Is "anago," Meaning To "Lead Up," Not The Usual Word Applied In Other New Testament Passages To The Idea Of Resurrection. The Whole Phrase Is Modeled On A Scriptural Passage, Isaiah 63:11: "Where Is He That Brought Up From The Sea The Shepherd Of The Sheep?" Elsewhere, Not Even An Allusion To Resurrection Is Made When Speaking Of Christ Taking His Place In Heaven Immediately Following The Death/Sacrifice. (As In 10:12: "Christ Offered For All Time One Sacrifice For Sins, And Took His Seat At The Right Hand Of God." Compare 12:2 And 1:3).]

¶ 120. - Hebrews 3:15-4:2 / 4:6-8

¹⁵ When scripture says, "Today if you hear his voice, do not grow stubborn as in those days of rebellion," who, I ask, were those who heard and rebelled? All those, surely, whom Moses had led out of Egypt. . . .

. . . ² For indeed we have heard the good news, as they did. But in them the message they heard did no good, because they brought no admixture of faith to the hearing of it. . . . [NEB]

Here the writer is referring back to a longer quotation he has just made of Psalm 95:7-11. The "today" he speaks of is his own present time, with again a reference to the idea of hearing a divine "voice," and in this case the Son is undoubtedly in mind. The comparison is between Israelites in the time of Moses, some of whom failed to heed the voice of God and suffered for it, and present members of the writer's community, some of whom are in danger of ignoring the new voice of the Son offering salvation and thus reaping terrible consequences. The key element of the comparison is hearing the "voice" and heeding it.

What is notably missing here is any conception that the "voice" of the Son was heard in another context, a recent and dramatic one, and was also not heeded by many: namely, those who heard Jesus' own preaching during his lifetime and failed to respond to his message, even to the point of killing him.

A few verses later (4:6-8), the writer draws an even more stark parallel, which makes no room for any such preaching of Jesus:

⁶ . . . and since those who first heard the good news failed to enter through unbelief, ⁷ God fixes another day. Speaking through the lips of David after many long years, he uses the words already quoted: "Today if you hear his voice, do not grow stubborn." ⁸ If Joshua had given them rest, God would not thus have spoken of another day after that. [NEB]

Let's be clear that the first phrase above refers to the Israelites under Moses. Those are the "days of rebellion" mentioned in 3:15. The reference to Joshua in 4:8 clinches it. The writer has all along been contrasting the present situation in his own community with the days of Moses. He may be using this example to make a general condemnation of all Jews as unresponsive and not heeding the truth prior to his own community (a common manner of thinking by the sectarian mentality).

Following that rebellion, that spurning of God's "rest" by many Israelites in the days of Moses and Joshua, God has set "another day" to deliver his message and offer people a chance to respond to it. And what is that day and that people? It is the writer's own. His silence indicates that he has no idea of an earlier day which would have been of even greater significance, namely the day when Jesus himself preached, and many failed to heed his message. Somewhat in the manner of Titus 1:3 or Romans 1:2-3, this passage leaves no room for an historical Jesus in the picture the author of this epistle paints of the history of his faith movement, between the days of Moses and the time of his own community.

¶ 121. - Hebrews 5:5-6

⁵ So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him: "You are my Son; today I have begotten thee." ⁶ And he says in another place: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." [NIV]

Once again, the author shows that he knows nothing about a baptism of Jesus in which God's voice out of heaven spoke the words of Psalm 2:7. (Verse 6 shows that the source of the words in verse 5 is scripture, not historical tradition.) Note that Jesus' entire role, in the view of this writer, is that of High Priest, whose activities the epistle places in a heavenly sanctuary, not on earth. This reference to God appointing Jesus in his role as provider of salvation seems to entirely lack an earthly or historical dimension.

¶ 122. - Hebrews 5:7

In the days of his flesh [en tais hemerai tes sarkos autou], he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his piety (reverence toward God). [NASB]

This passage is dealt with at length in my Supplementary Article No. 9, A Sacrifice in Heaven: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here let me make a couple of basic points. The reference cannot be to the Gospel scene in the garden of Gethsemane, since it does not fit that context (as many scholars, such as Paul Ellingworth, have recognized). There, God did not answer Jesus' prayer that the cup of suffering be allowed to pass him by. The above verse refers instead to a "deliverance out of death," which can mean the raising of Jesus (in his spirit state) to heaven

after death. But even that narrow an idea of 'resurrection' is not in view here. Rather, the writer goes on to say that the result of such prayers was that, through obedience and suffering, the Son became perfected and a source of salvation, through his designation by God as High Priest. There is not the slightest glance at a rising from a tomb on earth, an act which constitutes the Gospel 'deliverance' of Jesus from the fate of death, and the source of later Christian views of salvation.

And what of the phrase "in the days of his flesh"? This is perhaps the most graphic of all the references in the epistles which employ the stereotyped phrase "in flesh" (*kata sarka, en sarki*, etc.). My fullest and most recent discussion of this term is found in my Response to Pete in Reader Feedback file 14. "Flesh" seems to be, in the minds of the early Christian epistle writers, a shorthand way of referring to that state which Jesus (and other savior gods) assumed during their mythical activities, when they approached the world of matter and took on a "likeness" to material characteristics. In early Christian thought, that realm within the lower levels of the spiritual world, and Christ's activities within it, are discernible through scripture, and this passage illustrates that very thing. What is it that Christ is said to have done "in the days of his flesh"? Not the prayer in the Gethesemane garden, nor any other Gospel-based piece of historical data, but actions lifted out of scripture itself. Scholars such as Ellingworth, Montefiore and Buchanan have pointed out that the words refer to two passages in the Psalms, 116:1 and 22:24 (LXX). Like Ephesians 2:17 (#74), an epistle writer, at first glance, seems to bring Jesus to earth, and what does he offer as his activities in that sphere? The words and content of scripture.

This is the sole source of 'information' about what Jesus had done "in the days of his flesh." The total absence of any historical traditions from which writers like that of Hebrews could draw, whether as an example of Jesus' obedience to God, or of his humility and suffering (as in 1 Peter 2:22, 1 Clement 16, or Barnabas 5, all of whom can only quote from Isaiah 53), is strong indication that no oral traditions about an historical Jesus existed in the early Christian communities, and that their Christ lived only in scripture-revealed myth.

(Hebrews 5:7 will be revisited in the Appendix.)

¶ 123. - Hebrews 5:12

. . . you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God (ton logion tou theou), and you have come to need milk and not solid food . . . [NASB]

This community can have no concept of a teaching Christ, for the theology the writer is trying to get across to his readers ("about Melchizedek," verse 11) is entirely based on scripture, the "oracles (word) of God." The Jesus of the Gospels may have had nothing to say about Melchizedek or himself as High Priest, but any community which constructed a theology about its founder could not fail to develop traditions that he had in fact taught something which would support that theology.

If the writer and his community are advocating a christology which goes against the grain of the wider Christian movement (and every commentator would agree that Hebrews does so), we would expect to find an attempt, no matter how artificial or unfounded, to ground that christology in the teachings of Jesus himself. Such an attempt, or even an awareness of the problem, is nowhere in evidence. Instead, the entire basis is sought in scripture.

¶ 124. - Hebrews 6:1-2

¹*Let us, then, leave the initial teaching about Christ [NEB: let us stop discussing the rudiments of Christianity] and advance to maturity, not laying the foundation all over again: repentance from dead works, faith in God, ²instruction about baptisms, and laying-on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. [NAB]*

Here the writer is making a capsule summary of the basics of the community's belief and practice. They include teaching about Christ, repentance, baptism, the promise of eternal life. Anything proceeding from Jesus himself is notably missing. Even faith itself is centered on God, not on Jesus or anything he did. One might think that one of the rudiments of the new religion would be the faith that its founder, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Son of God and Messiah. Jesus' own teachings should also have formed one of the foundations of the faith.

¶ 125. - Hebrews 6:13-18

¹³*For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying: ¹⁴"I will surely bless you and multiply you." . . . ¹⁷So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, ¹⁸so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. [RSV]*

An astonishing silence, similar to one we will encounter again in 2 Peter 1:19. The hope of the writer and his community in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham is based on the wording of scripture, perceived as an oath by God to the dependability of his promises. Where is the hope based on the life and deeds of Jesus? Why was the career of the Son on earth not regarded as supporting God's promises, even if this took the form of invented sayings by him to provide that support, something which I noted earlier would inevitably have developed? When the writer, a few verses later (6:20), gets around to mentioning Jesus, it is entirely in terms of his spiritual-world activities in the heavenly sanctuary, as an eternal High Priest succeeding Melchizedek.

¶ 126. - Hebrews 7:1

This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham returning from the rout of the kings and blessed him; and Abraham gave him a tithe of everything as his portion. [NEB]

This verse is based on a short passage from Genesis, 14:18-20. And yet, the writer leaves out one key phrase in that piece of scripture. "And Melchizedek king of Salem *brought out bread and wine*; he was priest of God Most High." Now, why would a writer, one of whose primary concerns is to draw parallels between scriptural precedents and the christology and practice of his own community, leave out an obvious prefiguring of the Christian Eucharist in the action of Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine when greeting Abraham? The inevitable answer has to be that he and his community knew of no Eucharistic sacrament, nor any establishment of such by Jesus at a Last Supper.

This silence on the Christian Eucharist recurs even more dramatically in 9:19-20 when not even the words of Moses at the establishment of the Old Covenant on Sinai can prompt the writer to

mention the almost identical words of Jesus at the establishment of the new one, as recounted in the Gospels' Last Supper scene. (See "Top 20" #12.)

¶ 127. - Hebrews 7:12

For a change of priesthood must mean a change of [the] law. [NEB]

Again, when a concept of this magnitude takes place in a sectarian community—here a fundamental change of the idea of the high priest, from human to heavenly—one involving the very foundation of the Jewish covenant heritage, grounding it in something Jesus had taught would be desirable, even essential. The Gospels represent Jesus as pronouncing on the continued applicability of the Jewish Law, generally in the direction of 'relaxing' it, though Matthew goes against the grain and makes Jesus declare that not a letter of the law can be set aside. If this writer and his community had any tradition at all that Jesus had taught about the law, this would have to be taken into account, and there would be a scramble to find some way of making Jesus' words support their revolutionary attitude toward the high priesthood, in conjunction with their unusual christology. Instead, we find not a hint in the epistle of any awareness of such an issue.

Nor can one take refuge in postulating that this community knew little or nothing about Jesus' actual earthly teaching. The opening words of the epistle—"now in this final age he has spoken through the Son"—show that the concept of a teaching Jesus would have been of central interest to the community, leading either to an investigation of what Jesus had actually had to say, or to the development of an invented substitute. The inevitable conclusion is that the writer of Hebrews has no conception of a teaching career on earth for his High Priest Jesus.

¶ 128. - Hebrews 7:15-17

¹⁵*The argument becomes still clearer, if the new priest who arises is one like Melchizedek, owing his priesthood not to a system of earth-bound rules but to the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. ¹⁷For here is the testimony: "Thou art a priest forever, in the succession of Melchizedek." [NEB]*

A life that cannot be destroyed. Surely, if anything illustrated this feature of Jesus it was his resurrection from the dead. Instead, the sole basis the writer offers for this claim about Jesus is Psalm 110:4. The life that cannot be destroyed is presented in terms of its future continuation, in the role of heavenly High Priest, as guaranteed by the words of the Psalm.

Everything that Hebrews says about its heavenly figure is grounded in comparisons with scripture, chiefly about Melchizedek, the archetype of the new high priesthood. We might also note that if Jesus is "like" Melchizedek (and so much of the writer's christology is based on that justification), what do we make of that verse passed over earlier (7:3) which describes Melchizedek as being "without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever"? This judgment of Melchizedek is based on scriptural readings, but should not both the writer and his readers have felt a conflict between such characteristics and the Gospel story which gives Jesus both mother and father, and a beginning of days and an end of life?

Instead, in the thought of this epistle, the Son of God is an entity who eternally exists in the spiritual world and conducts his work in that realm, and all evidence of him comes from the sacred writings. As Hebrews 13:8 will say, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever." Such a sentiment shows a complete unawareness of the life and historically unique events recorded in the Gospels.

▮ 129. - Hebrews: Chapters 8 & 9

Chapters 8 and 9 are the theological heart of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for they describe the saving sacrifice of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. The philosophical grounding of this description is Platonic, in that a comparison is made between Christ's activities in "the real sanctuary, the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man" (8:2)—in other words, in heaven—and the tent on earth (9:1f) in which the human high priest conducted the counterpart earthly sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. (The author has in mind not the current Temple cult, but the legendary first establishment of the sacrificial system in the days of Moses at Sinai.) This counterpart comparison between the heavenly and the earthly, between the "genuine" and primary spiritual embodiment and the material "copy," is thorough Middle Platonism, with the higher spiritual version regarded as superior to the lower material one.

9:11 states that "the tent of Christ's priesthood is a greater and more perfect one, not made by men's hands, that is, not belonging to this created world; the blood of his sacrifice is his own blood, not the blood of goats and calves" [NEB]. In Hebrews, Christ's "sacrifice" is defined as the bringing of his blood into the heavenly sanctuary, a higher world counterpart of the high priest's actions on earth. But what is the nature of that "blood"? 9:14 calls Christ's offering of his own blood "a spiritual and eternal sacrifice" [NEB]. 9:23 says: "If, then, these sacrifices [of goats and calves in the earthly sanctuary] cleanse the copies of heavenly things, those heavenly things themselves require better sacrifices to cleanse them" [NEB]. The clear implication is that Christ's sacrifice, together with the blood itself, is a spiritual thing. In the Platonic system, it could not be any other.

Quite apart from the lack of any reference to a sacrifice on Calvary, or indeed on earth generally, the resounding silence here is to the one consideration which would destroy the writer's carefully crafted Platonist comparison, his contrast between the heavenly and the earthly. If Jesus had lived on earth and been a human being, if his sacrifice had taken place on a hill outside Jerusalem and the blood he shed there had been material, the author's comparison would not work. Christ's blood would, historically speaking, not have been "spiritual." This would have contaminated and confused the entire picture he paints in these chapters, and thus he should have felt forced to address the anomaly. Since he does not, we are led to assume that no historical Jesus, no sacrifice on earth, lurked in the background to disturb this finely drawn duality.

[Modern Scholars Generally Like To Play Down The Platonic Principle In Hebrews, No Doubt Because Of The Problems It Creates. But Scholars Earlier In This Century, Such As James Moffat And Marcus Dods, Had No Hesitation In Seeing Hebrews' Placement Of Christ's Sacrifice Within A Platonic World View. Moffat, It Is True, Did His Best [International Critical Commentary, *Hebrews*, P.124] To Make 9:14's Reference To "Blood (Sacrifice) Through The Eternal Spirit" Fit Into An Earthly Context As Well, Though He Allowed That "What Took Place In Time Upon The Cross . . . Took Place Really In The Eternal, Absolute Order." And More Recently, Paul Ellingworth Has Pointed Out [New International Greek Testament, *Hebrews*, P.457] The Uncertain Nature Of The 9:14 Phrase, Arguing Against A "Timeless" Or Spiritual Meaning. He Is Partially Right On The

'Timeless' Idea, But The Use Of "hapax/ephapax" (Once For All) In Regard To Christ's Heavenly Sacrifice Is Determined Largely By The Writer's Desire To Contrast That Sacrifice With And Make It Superior To Its Earthly Counterpart, The Repeated "Daily" Sacrifices Of The High Priests (7:27; Cf. 9:25). In The Context Of These Chapters As A Whole, The Higher/Lower World Dichotomy Is Unmistakable.]

¶ 130. - Hebrews 8:4

³Every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices: hence, this one too must have something to offer. ⁴Now if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest, since there are already priests who offer the gifts which the Law prescribes, ⁵though they minister in a sanctuary which is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly. . . . [NEB]

This passage might be called a "smoking gun," for it virtually spells out that Jesus had never been on earth. Though the point may seem trivial (and it is), the writer is comparing the heavenly High Priest, Christ, with his earthly counterparts, and here he makes the passing comment that Christ on earth would have nothing to do, since there are and have been priests who perform this role which the Law requires.

The tense here is ambiguous. The Greek for the key phrase is "*ei men oun en epi ges*" or literally: "now, therefore, if he were on earth," with the verb "were" in the imperfect. This is, strictly speaking, a past tense, and the NEB translation above reflects this, with its clear implication that Jesus had never been to earth. Scholars, naturally, shy away from this meaning. Paul Ellingworth [NIGT, *Hebrews*, p.405] admits that the NEB is grammatically possible, "since the imperfect in unreal conditions is temporally ambiguous." But he counters: "However, it goes against the context, in at least apparently excluding Christ's present ministry, and it could also be misunderstood as meaning that Jesus had never 'been on earth.' He thus opts for a translation like most others, "If he were [now] on earth, he would not be a priest at all."

Even with the latter translation, however, there is an awkward silence. The writer offers no qualification for an idea which *could* be misconstrued as covering past times. He shows no cognizance of the fact that Jesus *had* been on earth, and that an important part of his sacrifice had taken place there, the shedding of his blood on Calvary. The implication that he would have had nothing to do on earth, since there were already high priests there, goes against the obvious fact that he *had* had very much to do on earth. Ellingworth goes on to say that, "The argument presupposes, rather than states, that God cannot establish two priestly institutions in competition." This is indeed the case, yet with Christ the High Priest on earth, performing an important part his sacrifice on Calvary, such a competition would in fact be present, and the writer should have felt obligated to deal with it.

The epistle's fundamental point is the setting up of two counterpart sacrificial systems, the old and the new, the Sinai cult on earth and the heavenly sacrifice of Jesus which supplants it. The presence of Jesus on earth, crucified in the earthly sphere in the present or the past, would have foiled such a Platonic duality.

[Note The Contrast Here With The Terms "Flesh" (*sarx*) In 5:7 And "World/Universe" (*kosmos*) In 10:5. Whereas The Epistles Often Use Both These Terms, Especially The First, In Speaking Of Jesus' Activities, They Never Use 8:4's "ge" (Earth), Save For Here Where The Thought Is Clearly That Jesus Had Never Been To That Place.

This Passage, Along With Chapters 8 And 9 Generally, Is Thoroughly Discussed In Article No. 9, A Sacrifice In Heaven: The Son In The Epistle To The Hebrews.]

¶ 131. - Hebrews 8:8-12

Considering that the epistle writer himself (along with most Christians) seems oblivious to the void in the Old Testament passage he quotes here, we may step outside the strict boundaries of this "Sound of Silence" feature and observe a telling silence in one of the Hebrew prophets. Jeremiah 31:31-34, as quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12, has this to say:

"The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will conclude a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt; because they did not abide by the terms of that covenant, and I abandoned them, says the Lord. For the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, is this: I will set my laws in their understanding and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach one another, saying to brother and fellow-citizen: 'Know the Lord!' For all of them shall know me, from small to great; I will be merciful to their wicked deeds, and their sins I will remember no more at all." [NEB]

The scriptures were scoured by Jew and Christian alike for foreshadowings of the Messiah, and yet in perhaps the most prominent and direct forecast of the future made by a biblical prophet, one involving the fundamental idea of a new covenant to replace the old, there is not a glimmer of a Messiah or a Son of God. If the Deity was regarded as encoding into the sacred writings all manner of details about the life and work of Jesus, how is it that an open and unambiguous statement of God's plans for the future does not contain him? If salvation is now to be dependent on knowing and believing in Jesus, why is God's own forecast of his future requirements limited to 'knowing the Lord,' meaning himself? If Jesus' sacrifice was required to forgive sins, why does God's reference to the cancellation of sins make no mention of it?

The writer of Hebrews is using Jeremiah's prophecy to 'prove' the dissolution of the old covenant and thereby justify his own community's substitution of a new one, based on the idea of the Son's sacrifice in heaven. He, too, seems unaware of the void in the biblical passage which contains no forecast of his own christology of the Son as High Priest.

¶ 132. - Hebrews 9:11

But now Christ has come, high priest of good things already in being . . . and thus he has entered the sanctuary once and for all and secured an eternal deliverance. [NEB]

Or,

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things which have come to be, he entered once for all into the sanctuary . . . [NAB]

Somewhat like the silence in 8:4, this passage has a definite implication that Jesus had never "come" to earth. Whether that coming is expressed in the perfect tense (with present implications), as in the NEB translation, or in a strict past tense, as in most others, such an arrival

is linked exclusively with his entry into the heavenly sanctuary, which is a spiritual higher-world event. Ellingworth [*op.cit.* p.449] admits that "The reference is not to the incarnation, but to Christ's entry into heaven." His following comment is an understatement: "The question of whether the author thought of Christ as high priest from birth does not arise." We could expand that to say, the question of whether Christ had "come" to earth at all, to live a life and undergo a death prior to his "coming" into the heavenly tabernacle to perform his sacrifice, also does not arise. Is the author so devoid of all interest in the span of Jesus' life on earth that he can impart to it no significance or mention whatsoever?

Jean Héring (*Hebrews*, p.77) notes: "But the objection will be raised that the sacrifice was accomplished at Golgotha and not in heaven. Yet that event had a supernatural effect; it opened the way which leads to the heavenly Holy of Holies." This 'objection' is not only apparent to the minds of later Christians, it illustrates that to properly describe the sacrifice of Jesus, even in its "supernatural" implications, *some reference to Calvary and the physical dimension on earth must be made*. This is precisely what is missing over the entire length of Hebrews, not to mention virtually all the vast landscape of the New Testament epistles.

▮ — Hebrews 9:19-20: See "Top 20" #12

▮ 133. - Hebrews 9:24-26

²⁴*For Christ has entered, not that sanctuary made by men's hands which is only a symbol of the reality, but heaven itself, to appear now before God on our behalf. . . .*²⁶*. . . But as it is, he has appeared once and for all at the climax of history [literally, at the completion of the ages] to abolish sin by the sacrifice of himself. [NEB]*

The previous item (#132) questioned the meaning and significance of the word "coming" where it seems to be linked exclusively with the entry of Jesus into the heavenly sanctuary. Was the writer blind to any "coming" to earth?

Here we face a similar, but even more graphic and revealing situation. Verse 24 above speaks solely of Jesus' appearance (the verb *emphainizo*) before God, meaning in heaven. When we go on to verse 26, it too speaks of an "appearance" (the verb *phaneroo*), in this case at the end of the ages. The natural flow of meaning is to take the latter appearance as synonymous with the former one, in other words, it is the appearance in heaven. Since that latter appearance (in verse 26) is defined as the abolishing of sin by his sacrifice, and since such a sacrifice is always and exclusively spoken of as the entry of Jesus into the heavenly tabernacle, we must assume that in verse 26, too, the writer has in mind the heavenly event. The "appearing" at the climax of history and the abolishing of sin by his sacrifice, is a reference to a spiritual event in heaven, not an earthly one on Calvary in incarnated form.

But this creates a devastating silence on any "appearance" on earth. If Jesus' sacrifice in heaven is defined as the appearance which took place at the completion of the ages, where is the incarnation, which also should have been seen as taking place at such a time? There is no sign in this entire passage that the writer is making a switch, between verse 24 and verse 26, from the heavenly appearance to the earthly one. In verse 26, in fact, the verb used is *phaneroo*, one I have often pointed out would be an odd one to use to signify incarnation. It means to "reveal" or "be manifested." It can also mean to 'put in an appearance,' but here it can be aligned with all the

other usages of this word, and related ones, in the epistles (eg, 1 Peter 1:20, Romans 3:21 and 24, Romans 16:26, etc.) where the meaning is clearly the revelation of Christ or the bringing of him to the light of knowledge, usually by God. This enriched meaning of "appearance" in Hebrews 9:26 reinforces the concept that Jesus, for this writer, is a spiritual entity, revealed in this last period of the world as having undergone a heavenly sacrifice, the most important element of which is the entry into the higher world sanctuary. Neither room nor importance is given in any degree for a presence on earth or a sacrifice in those lower physical precincts. All of these points are discussed at length in Article No. 9, A Sacrifice in Heaven: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

[The Following Verses, 27-28, Contain A Reference To Jesus' Subsequent Appearance When The End-Time Actually Arrives. This Is Claimed To Be The One Clear Place In The Epistles Where A Reference Is Made To A *second* Coming. If It Were So, It Could Be Placed In Opposition To A *first* Coming Which Constituted The One Into The Heavenly Sanctuary. But There Is An Alternate Understanding For The Key Phrase Which Renders The Idea "Next" Rather Than "Second." This Question Will Be Examined In The Appendix, But Is Also Covered In The Epilogue To Article No. 9.]

¶ 134. - Hebrews 10:5-6

*That is why, at his coming into the world, he says:
"Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire,
But thou hast prepared a body for me.
Whole-offerings and sin-offerings thou didst not delight in.
Then I said, 'Here am I: as it is written of me in the scroll,
I have come, O God, to do thy will.' " (Psalm 40:6-8 LXX) [NEB]*

Perhaps the most significant passage in the early Christian documents which employs the idea of Christ speaking from scripture. The "he says" has been labeled the 'historic present' (Moffat, ICC, *Hebrews*, p.xxii) or 'timeless present' (Ellingworth, NIGT, *Hebrews*, p.499), but there is nothing of history here, and a close parallel is 1 Clement's use of the present tense in 16:15 to introduce the voice of Christ describing himself through the writings. (I prefer the term "mythical present," giving a picture of spiritual world realities.)

The key and distinguishing phrase here is "at his coming into the world," for which there is no parallel in any of the other passages using such a present tense. Either it refers in some way to Jesus' incarnation to earth, or it does not. If the former, the idea should have been expressed in the past. Some translations (RSV, Héring) simply place the thought in the past tense ("when he came into the world he said"), others try to offer some justification for linking it with the earthly advent, creating awkward images of the spirit of Christ speaking to the Father at the moment of birth.

If it does not (and the writer nowhere speaks of such a birth/advent, nor does he suggest that this was the prophecy of an historical event), we are left with a view of scripture as the material-world's window onto the realm of the spirit, where Christ acts. The atmosphere is identical to 2:14 (above, #119), in which Christ speaks from scripture about men being his brothers, and to 1:6 (above, #116), where God "says" things in scripture to the angels, when he presents the Son, his "first-born," to the world. The latter, despite the use of the term "*oikumene*," is clearly a heavenly event, and everything in 10:5 suggests that these words and the occasion on which they were 'spoken' is the same, or at least of the same sort. (Note that the word for world in the first

line above is "*kosmos*," which even more than *oikumene* in 1:6 can refer to the total 'universe' encompassing higher and lower realms.)

Christ and his supernatural world exist or are embodied in the pages of scripture. Within that mythical realm, he obediently takes on a 'body' (*soma*) prepared for him by God, to serve as a sacrifice which will supplant the old ones on earth that God no longer wants. This is an extension of the higher/lower world dichotomy set up in chapters 8 and 9, in which Christ's sacrifice in the heavenly tabernacle supplants the priestly sacrifices on earth. In fact, the reference is virtually identical, for verse 10 goes on to say that "we have been consecrated, through the offering of the body (*soma*) of Jesus Christ once and for all." The latter's use of the term *soma* in conjunction with the idea of "offering" places such a body, and the act being described throughout this passage, within the heavenly sanctuary, for the "offering" which is done "once for all" and which provides salvation is always located in that upper world, non-material setting. This illustrates that the concept of "body" can be located in the higher spiritual world, along with the concept of "blood." And by extension, the concept of "flesh."

These verses in Hebrews are a very revealing indicator of what sort of source—namely scriptural passages which referred to sacrifice, body, and elsewhere things like nailing and piercing—would have lead the earliest Christian thinkers to develop the concept that the spiritual Christ had descended and taken on lower forms. And that he had been crucified for sacrificial, redemptive purposes—all of it under wider influences of religious and philosophical expression, both Jewish and Hellenistic. For now, it all took place within the baser celestial spheres, at the hands of Satan and the demons. Later, the Son would descend all the way to earth.

¶ 135. - Hebrews 10:9

. . . And then he says, "I have come to do thy will." [NEB]

If 5:7 did indeed spell knowledge of the Gospel scene in Gethsemane, it would be curious that when the writer wishes to demonstrate that Jesus was obedient to God's will in accepting death and that he declared such obedience, he would not draw on Jesus' own words at that moment. Matthew has Jesus at Gethsemane say, "Yet not as I will, but as thou wilt." And Luke similarly, "Yet not my will but thine be done." (Both based on Mark.)

¶ 136. - Hebrews 10:12

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. [NIV]

Passages like this indicate that the writer of Hebrews has no concept of the resurrection as portrayed in the Gospels. Similar to 1:4, "when he had brought about the purgation of sins, he took his seat at the right hand of Majesty," the sacrifice is immediately followed by the arrival at the throne of God in heaven. (See also the same progression in 12:2 which, because of its passing reference to "the cross," will be discussed in the Appendix file.)

Even if one defines the act of sacrifice as the event in heaven when Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary with his blood, one still looks in vain in this epistle for any allowance for or mention of a time on earth between the initial shedding of the blood (however that may have been conceived) and the offering of it within heaven's tabernacle. Trying to take it into account

necessitates some awkward images and questions as to where Jesus' blood, shed on Calvary, was stored during the period of lying in tomb and making post-resurrection appearances on earth, and the entering of the heavenly sanctuary with that blood in tow.

¶ 137. - Hebrews 10:15-16

¹⁵Here we have also the testimony of the Holy Spirit: he first says, ¹⁶"This is the covenant which I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will set my laws in their hearts and write them on their understanding." [NEB]

Not only is this another quote of Jeremiah 31:31f. which lacks any prophecy of the Son (the passage is regarded as spoken through the Holy Spirit), the writer refers to this passage as "testimony" to the promised new covenant, created, in the thought of this community, by Christ's heavenly sacrifice (although Jeremiah contains no allusion to this either).

But with this focus on "testimony" to the new covenant, a further glaring silence reveals itself. One of the central events of the Gospel passion account is the Last Supper scene. It presents Jesus as pronouncing the establishment of a new covenant through his sacrifice, symbolized by the bread and wine of the meal. Just as we noted a complete silence on the Eucharist and Jesus' Last Supper words in 9:19-20, when the writer quotes the near identical words of Moses at the establishment of the old covenant (see "Top 20" #12), here too he fails to offer any of the Gospel sayings about that covenant, such as Mark 14:14, "This is my blood of the covenant, shed for many." (Compare Matthew 26:28 and Luke 22:20.)

It is impossible to believe that the community of Hebrews had any eucharistic rite, or any knowledge of such a sacramental meal established by Jesus. Its omission in the thought of a writer who is focused on the concept of a new covenant and Jesus as a priestly figure is one of those cases where the argument from silence is logically and irrefutably valid. Nor could this community, possessing the theological interests it did, possibly have remained ignorant of circulating traditions which told of the Last Supper and its significance. If it knew of Jesus sufficiently to create the cosmic christological interpretation found in this epistle, it would hardly have missed out on traditions about such an important episode of the passion.

We are forced to conclude, whether an historical Jesus existed or not, that no such event took place at the beginning of the movement. By extension, we can reject Paul's account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 as referring to a known historical event, or as something circulating through oral tradition based on eyewitness attendance.

¶ 138. - Hebrews 10:37

For 'soon, very soon' (in the words of Scripture), 'he who is to come will come; he will not delay . . .' [NEB]

The latter quote is from Habakkuk 2:3f. Literally, the Greek reads: "the one coming will come." *Ho Erchomenos*, "the Coming One," was a popular title for the expected Messiah, the one prophesied in scripture. Borrowing the 'soon's from Isaiah 26:20, the writer of Hebrews is declaring that the one long promised will arrive on earth shortly.

The void here is surely evident. Had not the Coming One, in the view of Christians, already come? If the writer knew of a human Jesus on whom his heavenly High Priest was based, could he possibly have left out that first advent in his prophetic equation? Is there any room for the historical figure between the scriptural promise and the future expected arrival? Not in these words.

Here is another in a growing list of statements by the early epistle writers which makes no allowance for the existence of an earthly Jesus in the historical past. I pointed out in the Introduction that when a silence is not just a silence, but entails an *exclusion* of the thing whose existence is in question, the argument from silence has a special and compelling validity. Nor will it do to object, as Mr. J. P. Holding has a habit of doing, that there was "no need" to mention such a thing, as everyone already knew it. In the above sort of case, this is not the point. The point is how the writer expresses himself. I may have just married for a second time (a hypothetical example only), and my friends may be aware that I had a first wife even if I don't speak of her, but I am not in that case likely to tell them that my recent marriage ceremony was a new experience for me.

¶ 139. - Hebrews 11

And what is faith? . . . [NEB]

With this question, the writer launches into a paean to those, in Jewish history, who have demonstrated faith and trust in God, and thereby received a range of benefits. Down the ages the litany rolls, from Abel and Enoch, to Abraham and Moses. In verse 32 he asks: "Need I say more?" He refers *en bloc* to figures like Samson and David, with their stories of trial, warfare, distress and even death: "These also, one and all, are commemorated for their faith."

He might very well have said more. Is it too much to expect that the figure of Jesus would have crossed the writer's mind in this connection? Would he not have been seen as one who placed faith in God throughout his life, had taught that very thing, and had demonstrated it in the endurance of his passion and death, finally to receive the ultimate benefit for such faith—his resurrection from the tomb?

We might note a couple of further silences in this passage. Verse 37, in describing the fates of some of the biblical figures, says: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were put to the sword, they went about dressed in skins of sheep or goats, in poverty, distress, and misery." For us, the figure of John the Baptist comes to mind here, not only for his death at the hands of Herod Antipas, but in the phrase "skins of sheep or goats," which is reminiscent of John's "rough coat of camel's hair" as described in Mark 1:6 and parallels. In view of the Gospels' focus on John and their presentation of him as Jesus' herald (derived from the Q tradition), this is something one would expect should have been familiar to most if not all Christian communities. (In "Top 20" #11, I also pointed out 1 Clement's lack of mention of the Baptist in that passage [17:1] where he refers to "those who went about in sheepskins and goatskins heralding the Messiah's coming.")

And what of Christian martyrs who exhibited faith and suffered for it? Acts portrays a well-established 'Hellenist' community in Jerusalem, whose leader Stephen dies by stoning for defending Jesus as Lord and Son of Man. One might expect that such a prominent figure and his fate would be known at least in the area of Palestine, where Hebrews is usually considered to

have been written. However, there is no mention of Acts' Stephen to be found in the entire first hundred years of Christian writing, and he is likely a fictional creation.

¶ — Hebrews 12:15-17: See "Top 20" #13

¶ 140. - Hebrews 12:18-29

¹⁸*Remember where you stand: not before the palpable, blazing fire of Sinai, with the darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, ¹⁹the trumpet blast and the oracular voice which they heard . . .*

²²*No, you stand before Mount Zion and the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, before myriads of angels, ²³the full concourse and assembly of the first-born citizens of heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of good men made perfect, ²⁴and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, whose sprinkled blood has better things to tell than the blood of Abel.*

²⁵*See that you do not refuse to hear the voice that speaks. Those who refused to hear the oracle speaking on earth found no escape; still less shall we escape if we refuse to hear the One who speaks from heaven. ²⁶Then indeed his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once again I will shake not earth alone, but heavens also.' . . . ²⁸. . . Let us therefore give thanks to God, and so worship him as he would be worshiped, with reverence and awe; ²⁹for our God is a devouring fire. [NEB]*

With these verses (I have broken them into paragraphs for clarity's sake and made a few cuts), we arrive at the climax of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The entire content of the letter: the doctrine of the new covenant established through the sacrifice of Jesus, his entry into the heavenly sanctuary, the exhortations to faith, all seem laid out like some carefully planned build-up to this final peroration, urging steadfastness on the readers and giving dire warning against apostasy. If this were music, Hebrews would be one vast movement of a symphony, unfolding through its broad, intricate themes to a last mighty climax.

Yet we must ask what this first-century symphonist has given us in his great Coda. His major themes have been built around the contrast between the old and new covenants. Like a good composer, he develops these musical motifs through the course of his work, and he recapitulates them when he gives us his summing up, restating them in powerful, clear form.

Yet these are strange and unexpected melodies. From the opening verses the author of Hebrews establishes his contrast between the old and the new: how God spoke in former times through the prophets, and how he has spoken now in this final age through his Son. Angels had been associated with the former voice, and the Son has been proven superior to them. In his summation in chapter 12, he again gives us the voices of the old and new covenants. But neither at the beginning nor the end, nor indeed at any point in the entire work, do we hear words from the Son himself on earth.

As the writer began his work, calling on divine words to express the new salvation and provide proof for the Son's role in it, the voice was solely that of God, as recorded in the Old Testament, with that voice occasionally placed in the heavenly Son's mouth. Here at the climax, after reminding his readers of the voice of God at Sinai, he turns to the voice which Christians must heed today. What voice does he give them? It is the voice of "the One who speaks from heaven,"

words once more from the Old Testament. It remains the voice of God. The writer of Hebrews, like all his first century fellows, is deaf to the melody of Jesus, to the rich music of the Gospel teachings, for he has given us not a note of it.

But the void in the music of Hebrews goes even deeper, as it does in the rest of the early Christian literature. Here in chapter 12 the author has first invited his readers to stand in their mind's eye by the mount of Sinai where the old covenant was granted. When he brings them to the scene of the new covenant, it is to Mt. Zion and not to the mount of Calvary. It is to the new, heavenly Jerusalem, and not to the hill beside the earthly city, nor to the empty tomb which lay in the same vicinity. How can images of these places and the significance they bore, transmitted through oral tradition and nourishing the faith and fervor of every Christian community, not dominate the writer's thinking and expression?

It matters not that scholars might claim (and often do) that a writer may, for example in this case, wish to contrast the earthly Mt. Sinai with the heavenly Mt. Zion; or that his argument or personal disposition lent itself to using Old Testament imagery exclusively. What possible disposition could lead him to exclude from his writings all the motifs of his new faith, to construct his elaborate theology without them? Here and elsewhere, the true governing factor is surely overlooked. If the Gospel story had been known, the line of argument would have been shaped to accommodate that knowledge. If the story of Jesus of Nazareth were at home in the minds of these writers, it would have *imposed* itself upon their discussions, their thought processes. Moffat, in his study of Hebrews, would have us believe that the author did not make use of the idea of Jesus' resurrection because he was confining his High Priest analogy to the biblical prototype of the Day of Atonement sacrifice and there was no 'slot' for it! Can we possibly think that *any* such consideration would lead a Christian writer to reject the rising of Jesus from his tomb as 'unusable' and ignore it for 13 chapters?

¶ 141. - Hebrews 13:2

Remember to show hospitality. There are some who, by so doing, have entertained angels without knowing it. [NEB]

Following the mighty peroration of chapter 12, chapter 13 of the Epistle to the Hebrews is more than a denouement, it is a let-down. Some have suggested it has the feel of a tacked-on piece, designed to turn a theological treatise, an ambitious homily, into a standard epistle in keeping with the second century's preference for that genre as a vehicle for imparting doctrinal views. Others suggest only some of the later verses are subsequent additions.

In any case, such additions are not late enough to reflect an historical Jesus. The above verse raises the image of entertaining an even greater anonymous guest. Surely there were some who, during his ministry on earth, had entertained the Son of God without knowing it!

¶ 142. - Hebrews 13:5-6

Do not live for money; be content with what you have; for God himself has said, "I will never leave you or desert you." And so we can take courage and say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?" [NEB]

The author quotes Psalm 118, but what of Jesus' moving and poetic equivalent in the Sermon on the Mount about putting away anxious thoughts and worries about the necessities of life? "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (Mt. 6:32). The writer draws also on Deuteronomy (31:6) for the assurance that God will not desert the believer, but did not Jesus say the same thing to his disciples? "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). Matthew's saying may be his own invention, or a tradition that did not happen to reach the community of Hebrews, but where such an important need was concerned, a tradition about such an assurance would have been very likely to develop on its own.

¶ 143. - Hebrews 13:7

Remember your leaders, those who first spoke God's message to you; and reflecting upon the outcome of their life and work, follow the example of their faith. [NEB]

Once again an early epistle writer (or interpolator) brings home to us the stark reality that the Christ belief movement which constituted earliest Christianity began with a response to a perceived revelation by God, to a message imparted through such revelation by God. Any idea of a message or a beginning in a Jesus on earth, preaching and acting in his own right, is notably missing. Missing, too, is the concept of apostolic tradition, the idea that word and doctrine about Jesus was spread through a chain of apostles going back to those who had actually followed and learned from him on earth.

Here the "example" comes from the community's own leaders. The faith and christology of Hebrews is an independent, self-generated one, the product of a sectarian group who have taken their beliefs from scripture and the philosophical trends of the time.

¶ 144. - Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. [NEB]

For this, the last silence in what is possibly the most revealing of all the New Testament epistles, I will simply quote the final paragraph in my Supplementary Article No. 9, A Sacrifice in Heaven: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which I would recommend for a fuller examination of many of the points raised in this Sound of Silence installment.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever," the author intones in 13:8. Could a divine Son, pre-existent in heaven before his incarnation, who was born fully human in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the Great, who grew up and ministered in Galilee, was slain in Jerusalem and rose bodily from the dead to return to heaven—could he be spoken of in this fashion? But of a mythical Christ who operated entirely in the spiritual sphere, in a timeless, Platonic existence, one who had never been to earth and was known only by divine revelation from the pages of scripture, such an affirmation would be perfectly apt.

The Epistle Of James, 1 & 2 Peter

James

¶ 145. - James 1:1

From James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Greetings to the Twelve Tribes dispersed throughout the world. [NEB]

One of the commonest passages appealed to by those who deny any possibility that Jesus was a mythical figure in the eyes of the early Christians is Galatians 1:19, containing Paul's reference to the apostle James in Jerusalem as "brother of the Lord." The likely meaning of that phrase as a title given to James as head of the Jerusalem brotherhood (it may also be a marginal gloss by a later scribe, subsequently inserted into the text), has been argued elsewhere. (See my Response to Sean in Reader Feedback Set 3.)

What is rarely if ever addressed by those who point to Galatians 1:19 is the silence we find on any such sibling relationship to Jesus in the opening of the epistle of James. If James were indeed the brother of Jesus, it is difficult to fathom why the writer of this letter would simply designate him a "servant" of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not his brother. This is not only so if one assumes the letter is genuinely by James (which only the most conservative scholars would maintain) but also, and especially, if the letter was written under his name (pseudonymous) or had such an ascription added some time after it was written. The whole point of ascribing a piece of writing to a famous figure is to give it authority. The greater the authority, the better will be the support for the arguments the writer is putting forward.

Consequently, it stands to reason that the writer would want to include everything about James that would raise him in the readers' eyes. His relationship to Jesus as blood brother would certainly do that. And there is no denying that such a thought would be a natural one to express under any circumstances. Commentators recognize this silence as problematic and have attempted various explanations for it, none of which are very convincing. (See the latter part of my above-noted response to Sean for examples of these explanations.)

We will find a similar silence on a blood relationship to Jesus when we look at the opening of the epistle ascribed to Jude.

¶ 146. - James 1:5

If any of you falls short in wisdom, he should ask God for it and it will be given him, for God is a generous giver who neither refuses nor reproaches anyone. [NEB]

Can we envision any Christian preacher today, seeking to convince his audience that God will give when he is asked, who would not appeal to Jesus' own assurances on this matter? Why did this writer not add the thought that Jesus himself had said: "Ask and you shall receive" (Mt. 7:7)? A similar silence is found in 4:2-3.

This is only the first of many instances in this epistle where a pointer to Jesus' teachings would have been natural and expected. In fact, there are so many echoes of Gospel sayings in this little letter that it is almost a compendium of Christian ethics. Yet not even a general reference to Jesus as a teacher can be found. The only glance in his direction (following the opening

ascription) comes in 2:1: "Believing as you do in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." The language here points to a Jesus Christ who is a divine entity in heaven, one who can be "believed in." Nothing in this epistle conveys the sense that the community enjoys a living body of traditions about a man who had recently been on earth, teaching, working miracles, dying and rising. In fact, as we shall see, there is not a murmur anywhere about a death and resurrection.

[The Silence On The Teaching Jesus Is So Profound In This Epistle That Scholars Have Been Driven To The Most Desperate Lengths To Accommodate It. None More So Than Sophie Laws, In Her Commentary, *The Epistle of James* (P.34): "Whereas The Gospels Have One Form Of Adoption Of Jesus' Teaching, In That They Identify It As His, James Provides Evidence Of Another Way Of Retaining And Preserving It: Absorbed Without Differentiation Into The General Stock Of Ethical Material."

This Explanation Is A Kind Of Argument From Silence Turned On Its Head. Since James Makes No Mention Of Jesus Whatever In Regard To These Ethical Teachings, This Is Evidence That They Were In Fact His! Another Commentator On James, Peter H. Davids, Acknowledges (*James*, P.16) That Document After Document Clearly Fails To Label Jesus As The Source Of Their Moral Teachings; Accordingly, He Labels Them "Allusions," Thus Defining The Silence So As To Make It Appear The Opposite Of What It Is.

And What Do These Observations Do For The Theory Of Oral Transmission? How Are Jesus' Teachings Kept Alive Through The Decades Before The Composition Of The Gospels By Being "Absorbed Into The General Stock Of Ethical Material"? Nor Does Laws Make Any Attempt To Theorize Why Such A Bizarre Development Would Have Taken Place, Especially Among People Who Had Presumably Experienced The Master Himself. Why Would They Choose To Give Him No Credit For His Revolutionary Teachings, To Make No Witness About Him To Fellow-Believers And Converts? Yet The Probable Explanation Is Too Unpalatable. If All These Teachings Are Never Attributed To Jesus In The Early Documents (Compare The Equally Profound Silence On Jesus As The Source Of The Many Teachings Found In The Didache), Then The Logical Conclusion Is That They Come From Other Sources And Were Only Attached To Such A Figure Later.]

¶ 147. - James 1:9-10

⁹*The brother in humble circumstances may well be proud that God lifts him up; ¹⁰and the wealthy brother must find his pride in being brought low. [NEB]*

One of the most characteristic teachings in the Kingdom of God movement was the promise of reversal of fortune: the rich and powerful would be brought down, the poor and dispossessed would be raised up. Who when expressing such a thought could avoid quoting Jesus' prediction of that very thing: "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled; and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt. 23:12)? This powerful promise is quoted twice in Luke as well (Lk. 14:11 and 18:14). On its source in Jesus, James is silent, though he will point to a different source in 4:6 (#153).

¶ 148. - James 1:21-22

²¹*Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your souls.* ²²*Only be sure that you act on the word and do not merely listen . . .* [NIV/NEB]

Here the writer makes the only allusion to soteriology in the epistle. What is it that gives salvation to the soul of the believer? It is not the death and resurrection of Jesus, nor even the teachings identified as his. It is "the word planted in you" which, if we look back to earlier verses (1:17-18), is identified as coming from God himself, with no suggestion that a Jesus on earth had served as an intermediary: "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father . . . In the exercise of his will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be the first fruits among His creatures." [NASB]

This is a community of faith that comes solely from the revealed word of God. There is no sense here of Jesus as either Redeemer or Revealer, and only an unattributed echo is heard of Matthew's line in Jesus' mouth (7:24): "What then of the man who hears these words of mine and acts upon them?"

¶ 149. - James 2:5

Listen, my friends. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? [NEB]

This is a prime example of an epistle writer 'urging' that his readers accept what he is saying, to have faith that something will happen or to follow a desirable mode of behavior. If Jesus himself had urged this very faith or practice, what Christian writer would not choose to clearly highlight such a thing? The argument that "there was no need" to do so cannot be invoked here, since every instinct on the part of such writers would impel them to make mention of Jesus' own words. Yet not even here, in echoing the memorable opening of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (5:3) or Luke's Sermon on the Plain (6:20), can this writer bring himself to state that connection with Jesus' pronouncement: "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

¶ 150. - James 2:8

If you are observing the sovereign law laid down in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' that is excellent. [NEB]

Hardly less memorable is Jesus' general teaching on love, at least in the minds of two millennia of Christians who tend to view such a teaching as the centerpiece of Jesus' ethics. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, as James does above, Jesus more than once quotes Leviticus, while answering the question "Which is the greatest commandment?" James shows no sign that he is aware of this pronouncement by Jesus. Twice does Paul do exactly what Jesus is reported to have done. In Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14 he speaks of the whole Law being "summed up" in the one rule of 'loving one's neighbor.' Like James, he makes no mention of Jesus' own view on the matter.

Christian love is an obsessive focus in almost every epistle writer, yet not a single one of them points to Jesus as a teacher on the topic. Paul, as we have seen, goes so far as to say (1 Thessalonians 4:9) that: "You are taught *by God* to love one another"!

¶ 151. - James 2:10

For if a man keeps the whole law apart from one single point, he is guilty of breaking all of it. [NEB]

Matthew and Luke, drawing from Q, have Jesus express the conviction that "not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law" (Mt. 5:18). The continued applicability of the Mosaic Law was a hotly debated issue in the early Christian movement. We can safely state as a general principle where any movement based on a great teacher is concerned, that any important issue will soon be regarded as having been pronounced upon by him, regardless of whether he did or not. While scholars tend not to take Q's statement on the Law, as reflected by Matthew and Luke, as authentic, its presence in their Gospels illustrates this principle (as do so many other Gospel sayings rejected as 'inauthentic'). Yet James here makes no appeal to any pronouncement by Jesus to support his own claim on this very important matter.

¶ 152. - James 4:4

Have you never learned that love of the world is enmity to God? Whoever chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy. [NEB]

Matthew 6:24: "No servant can be slave to two masters; for either he will hate the first and love the second, or he will be devoted to the first and think nothing of the second. You cannot serve God and Money."

¶ 153. - James 4:6 . . . 10

⁶. . . *Thus Scripture says, 'God opposes the arrogant and gives grace to the humble
¹⁰Humble yourselves before God and he will lift you high. [NEB]*

As in 1:9, 'James' fails to appeal to Jesus' assurances that the exalted will be humbled and the humble exalted. But he goes further in this verse, in that he apparently feels the need to ground his thought in some authority. The authority he chooses is not the teaching of Jesus, but the quotation of a passage from Proverbs. If we can make anything resembling a logical deduction in this field of research, we are surely entitled to claim that the writer of this epistle can have no knowledge of Jesus' teaching on this matter.

¶ 154. - James 4:11

Do not, my brothers, speak ill of one another. The one who speaks ill of his brother or judges his brother is speaking against the law. [NAB]

Matthew 7:1f: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

¶ 155. - James 5:1-3

¹*Next a word to you who have great possessions. . . .* ²*Your riches have rotted; your fine clothes are moth-eaten;* ³*your silver and gold have rusted away . . . [NEB]*

Again, an example of 'urging' a point of view on those who would not be sympathetic to it. No writer in such a situation could have passed up a pronouncement imputed to Jesus on this point of view, as we find in Matthew 6:19-20 (and Luke 11:33-34, from Q): "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in to steal it. Store up treasure in heaven, where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. For where your wealth is, there will your heart be also."

¶ 156. - James 5:6

You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you. [NASB]

Continuing his condemnation of the rich and powerful, the writer of James accuses them of killing the innocent, who are unable to offer any resistance. Not only does he hear no echo of the teaching Jesus in his ethical admonitions throughout the epistle, he apparently possesses in his mind no image of the Gospel picture of Jesus' death. Who could fail to draw the natural comparison to the powerful authorities who had condemned an innocent Jesus to death, and his humble acceptance of such a fate? This silence is intensified when we get to 5:10, where the writer says: "If you want an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." (See Top 20, #10.)

¶ 157. - James 5:7

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. [NASB]

One of the prominent ideas of the Gospels is that Jesus would return at the end of the world to judge humanity and bring about God's kingdom. The writer of James seems to know nothing about this, for his reference to the "coming of the Lord" is a reference to the traditional Jewish expectation of the Day of the Lord, when God himself would come to judge the world and establish his kingdom.

That "the Lord" in the verse above is a reference to God and not to Jesus can be clearly seen from an examination of the passage as a whole. In verse 10, the writer refers (as noted above) to the prophets "who spoke in the name of the Lord," which must be a reference to God. In verse 11, the readers are reminded: "You have all heard how Job stood firm, and you have seen how the Lord treated him in the end," again a clear reference to the God of the Old Testament writings. Nothing would indicate that the epistle writer abruptly changed his meaning in the use of the term "Lord" in verse 7.

¶ — James 5:10 - See "Top 20" #10

¶ 158. - James 5:12

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment. [NASB]

Here the writer is virtually *commanding* his readers to follow a specific mode of conduct. Had Jesus spoken a similar command, and he was aware of it, there can be no doubt that he would have appealed to it. In Matthew 5:34-37 we read: "But what I tell you is this: You are not to swear at all . . . Plain 'Yes' or 'No' is all you need to say; anything beyond that comes from the devil."

¶ — James 5:15 - See "Top 20" #19

1 Peter

¶ 159. - 1 Peter 1:4-5 . . . 7

⁴The inheritance to which we are born is one that nothing can destroy or spoil or wither. It is kept for you in heaven, ⁵and you, because you put your faith in God, are under the protection of his power until salvation comes—the salvation which is even now in readiness and will be revealed at the end of time. . . . ⁷. . . so that your faith may prove itself worthy of all praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. [NEB]

As in so many other similar references to the coming of Christ throughout the epistles, there is again no sense of this being a return, or second coming. Instead, the verb "revealed" conveys the idea that Christ will be seen for the first time only at the Parousia (coming/presence). Even the concept of "salvation" is something that will be manifested only at the Parousia. Can these writers and readers have the life and death of Jesus before their mind's eye and not express the thought that salvation had arrived at the time of those events, that it had been revealed in the person and deeds of Jesus on earth?

Here we have the precise language that would fit the mythicist interpretation. Knowledge about Jesus, who underwent his sacrificial redeeming act in a mythical time and place, has been revealed to the world through inspired Christian prophets, but when the End-time arrives, he will become visible to all, arriving on earth in his glorious Parousia. The text conveys nothing of the recent earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth.

¶ 160. - 1 Peter 1:8

You have not seen him, yet you love him; and trusting in him now without seeing him, you are transported with a joy too great for words . . . [NEB]

Here the writer talks of "seeing" Christ. Commentators assume that, the writer being Peter or purporting to be Peter, the implication is that 'whereas I and others have actually seen him (in person) and thus believe, you have not and yet do.' The text hardly goes this far, and any such meaning is simply being read into it. In fact, it is remarkable that no such sentiment *is* openly expressed. Here is a piece of writing represented as written by the chief apostle of Jesus on earth, and yet the speaker never mentions that fact, never talks about any of the things he *did* see with his own eyes.

The verb "to see" in this verse is the one used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1: "Have I not seen the Lord?" This, of course, refers not to having been an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry but to a visionary experience, which Paul claims to have shared with all the others. When we move on to 5:1 in this epistle, we will encounter another statement commonly interpreted as meaning that 'Peter' has "seen" Christ in the flesh. There he is a "witness" of Christ's suffering, but the word is "*martus*" which refers to one who 'bears witness about.' In the context of religious belief, this means to profess one's faith in, not to offer some physical eyewitness. The writer of this epistle clearly has no sense that Peter knew Jesus on earth.

F. W. Beare (*First Epistle of Peter*, p.88) admits that the implication that the writer *has* seen Christ with his own eyes is "far-fetched." The idea of believing without seeing is a common one in the New Testament, especially in Paul, and a check of those passages shows (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:7, Romans 8:24-25) that the idea is simply: we do believe in someone or something we do not see. No more than this is meant here in 1 Peter. In fact, one of the remarkable omissions here and elsewhere in the epistles is that no comparison is ever made between those who 'do not see' Christ, and those who presumably *had* seen him during his ministry on earth. When Paul says (2 Cor. 5:7) that "faith is our guide, we do not see him," there is no suggestion that this does not apply to everyone, apostles, prophets or anyone else alive today. There is no suggestion that many fortunate people did in fact recently have the privilege of seeing Christ in person with their own eyes.

¶ 161. - 1 Peter 1:12

It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you [i.e., they were speaking not of matters relating to their own time but to yours], in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven . . . [RSV]

Here we have yet another instance (compare Romans 1:2 and Titus 1:3) where an epistle writer points to an ancient event or prophecy in scripture, and moves from there to a present fulfillment in the apostolic movement, with no glance at any intervening event or fulfillment in the life of Jesus. The prophets have made predictions in the past, and those matters are now embodied in the gospel preached by apostles inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is Jesus' own chief apostle, and yet he cannot express the thought that such apostles have been inspired by Jesus himself and are carrying on his own preaching work!

The previous verses (1:10-11) are often pointed to as containing an oblique reference to an historical Jesus, in that the latter part of verse 11 is usually translated: "foretelling the sufferings in store *for Christ* and the splendors to follow." This passage will be dealt with at length in the Appendix, but here it can briefly be noted that, while such sufferings could be taken as applying to those of Christ in the higher world, in a mythical setting, an alternative understanding of this verse has been given by some translators. Not that Christ's sufferings are meant, but the believers' own. The *for Christ* is "*eis Christon*" which could produce the translation: ". . . the sufferings in store (for you, the believers) on your way to Christ and the splendors (yours) to follow." Selwyn uses the phrase "on the Christward road" (see Ernest Best, *1 Peter*, p.81-3).

Reverting to the verse under examination, the writer mentions that these matters—about the sufferings destined, supposedly, for Jesus—were brought to the readers by the apostles. But if there was any subject about which Jesus himself had a lot to say, as recorded in the Gospels, it was his suffering, death and resurrection. Thus, we might have expected the writer to express a thought like: "as Jesus himself foretold to us who were with him, in his prophecies about the Son of Man." (The latter term, incidentally, is notably absent in all the epistles.)

¶ 162. - 1 Peter 1:15

The One who called you is holy; like him, be holy in all your behavior, because Scripture says, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' [NEB]

The quotation from scripture (Leviticus 19:2) shows that the reference here is to God. Not only does this writer regard Christians as having been "called" by God, not Jesus, but God and not Jesus of Nazareth is offered as the benchmark of holiness, the example to be followed in the Christian's own practice of holiness. The profound void on the Gospel Jesus in the minds of first century Christians is rarely demonstrated so compellingly.

F. W. Beare (*1 Peter*, p.98) points out that "The rule of Christian conduct is holiness, modeled upon the holiness of God," and it is true that this is a theme running through the Old Testament. The writer is no doubt drawing upon it in expressing his idea. But the Old Testament did not have the available example of a Jesus. Christ on earth would have been an even more ideal model for Christian holiness, especially in the attributes the writer has just been discussing: self-control, obedience, general moral rectitude. And he, unlike God, had lived in human form and taken on the weaknesses, presumably, of flesh. Offering Jesus as an example should have been virtually inevitable by a writer who was supposed to have known him intimately in person.

This is a powerful silence, one to which the "no need to mention" explanation is entirely inapplicable.

¶ 163. - 1 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰*He (Christ) was predestined before the foundation of the world, and in this last period of time he was made manifest for your sake.* ²¹*Through him you have come to trust in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, and so your faith and hope are fixed on God. [NEB]*

In verse 20, the verb "made manifest" is *phaneroo*: to reveal, bring to light. Moreover, the form is the *passive* participle. Christ is not the agency of his own revelation; rather, someone revealed

him. This would be an extremely awkward way of describing Jesus' own coming to earth and living a life in full view of many.

Verse 21 shows who that agent of revelation was: God. This is in keeping with the way Paul and others consistently describe the present advent of the Son: he is an entity who has now been revealed through scripture to inspired apostles like himself, by God and the Spirit. This Son was previously unknown, a secret hidden through long generations, but he has now been disclosed (Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:5, etc.). Verse 21 concludes with the universal focus of the epistle writers: their faith and hope are fixed on God. No movement proceeding from the person of Jesus on earth, preaching such a person and following his example, could consistently and exclusively think, feel and express itself this way.

¶ 164. - 1 Peter 1:23-25

²³ *You have been born anew, not of mortal parentage but of immortal, through the living and enduring word of God.* ²⁴ *For (as Scripture says):*

'All mortals are like grass;

All their splendor like the flower of the field;

The grass withers, the flower falls;

²⁵ *But the word of the Lord endures for evermore.'*

And this 'word' is the word of the Gospel preached to you. [NEB]

Another profound silence here. If Jesus taught that one must be "born again," or indeed if he taught anything, this writer seems to know nothing about it. For him the Christian is born anew, not through the word preached by Jesus, but by the word of God, found in scripture. That word is also contained in the Gospel preached by Christian prophets, but there is no sign that this is to be derived in any way from an earthly Jesus. Rather, it is the word of God in the sacred writings, and other passages (such as Romans 1:2) have also stated that the Gospel preached by such as Paul is one derived from God and scripture and not from any precedent in Jesus. No wonder no one ever attributes Christian ethics to Jesus; the concept itself doesn't exist in the minds of the early Christian writers.

¶ 165. - 1 Peter 2:12

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. [NIV]

This is yet another example of ignorance about the Gospel tradition that Jesus will be returning (as the Son of Man) to judge the world. Instead, like similar instances in James and 1 John, this community adheres to the older tradition that it is God himself who will be coming to earth, on the Day of the Lord. We must assume that the writer, Peter or otherwise, has no recollection of hearing Jesus' own predictions about his future return.

The thought in the opening part of this verse is very similar to one expressed by Jesus in Matthew 5:16: "And you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven." A reminder of this would not have been out of place here.

¶ 166. - 1 Peter 2:13

Submit yourselves to every human institution for the sake of the Lord. [NEB]

This writer must have no awareness of Jesus' famous dictum: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (A similar silence can be found in 2:17.)

¶ 167. - 1 Peter 2:21-23

²¹*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example.*

²²*He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips.* ²³*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. [RSV]*

Here, the writer wishes to point to Christ's sufferings and humility, as an example for his readers to follow. Does he cite oral traditions about Jesus' historical sufferings on Calvary? No, he paraphrases elements of Isaiah 53, the "song" of the Suffering Servant, a scriptural passage which contributed more than any other to the development of early thought about a suffering Christian Messiah in the spiritual realm. Scripture was the source of information about the Christ, which is why the early epistle writers consistently appeal to it in describing Christ's experiences. Later, Isaiah 53 contributed many details to the Markan Passion story. We can hear above some allusions to features of that story: the silence maintained at Jesus' trial before Pilate and the High Priest, his stoic bearing of abuse, his innocence.

Verse 22 is a close copy of Isaiah 53:9b: "For he practiced no iniquity, nor was deceit in his mouth." Verse 23 is dependent on the ideas of 53:7: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

There is another silence evident in this passage. Jesus is sometimes portrayed in the Gospels as urging or warning his followers that they must follow and suffer in his footsteps. Yet the writer appeals to no such saying as: "Take up your cross and follow me." Had Jesus himself required that his followers emulate his suffering, it is difficult to believe that the writer would not have appealed to it. (In the Q from which this Gospel saying is taken, there is no support for the idea that the original saying referred to the cross of Jesus himself, thus constituting an allusion to the crucifixion. The cross is a *potential* one for the follower, and the saying may have been a circulating proverb.)

¶ 168. - 1 Peter 3:5-6

⁵*Thus it was among God's people in days of old: the women who fixed their hopes on him adorned themselves by submission to their husbands.* ⁶*Such was Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him 'my master.' Her children you have now become, if you do good and show no fear. [NEB]*

Here (in verses 1 through 6) the writer fails to hold up Mary, Jesus' mother, as a model when he is advising women to be chaste, submissive in their behavior, and reverent like those "who fixed their hopes on (God)." Mary's submission to God's will is perhaps the most prominent characteristic given to her by Christian writers, as in the Magnificat of Luke's announcement scene (1:46-55). In 1 Peter, the writer can only offer Sarah.

¶ 169. - 1 Peter 3:14

But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. [RSV]

Matthew 5:10: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Perhaps Peter wasn't present for the Sermon on the Mount.

¶ 170. - 1 Peter 3:18-19

¹⁸*In the body [i.e., flesh, sarki] he was put to death; in the spirit he was brought to life. ¹⁹And in the spirit he went and made his proclamation to the imprisoned spirits. [NEB]*

The glaring silence here concerns Christ's bodily resurrection, the Easter miracle described in the Gospels. There is no sign of such a concept in this epistle. Christ "came to life" in the spirit state and world; what he did in that spirit state was to visit the souls of the dead. Verse 22 then has him entering heaven after receiving the submission of the "angelic authorities and powers." The writer of this epistle can have no knowledge of the Gospel post-resurrection scenes, which portray Peter as being among the first to see the risen Christ in the flesh. He can speak of Christ visiting the angels after death, but nothing about him coming to life in the body and visiting his own followers.

[In The First Part Of Verse 18, We Again Encounter That Curious, Stereotypical Way The Epistle Writers Have Of Referring To Jesus' Death And The Occasional Other 'Human' Sounding Feature. They Employ The Word "Flesh" (sarx) In Standard Phrases Like (en) sarki, kata sarka. The Translation Of These Phrases Is By No Means Certain, And They Are Used In A Variety Of Ways Which Are Not Identical. (Compare, For Example, Romans 1:3 And 2 Corinthians 5:16.) If There Is A Common Implication About Them All, It Is The Idea Of 'Relation To The Material World Of The Flesh,' Whether This Means The Abstract 'Worldly Standards' (As In 2 Cor. 5:16) Or An Entering Of The God Into A State Or Arena Where He Takes On Counterpart Features Or "Likeness" To The Flesh. For A Divine Being To Communicate With And Impact Upon The Human World, He Must Leave His Fully Transcendent State In The Highest Heaven And Approach The Realm Of Matter, Whether One Is Referring To The Savior-God Concept Or To The Simpler Idea Of The Logos As A Divine Force And Channel Between God And The World. In Other Words, He/It Must Become "Immanent." (See The Fuller Discussion In The Appendix Article Under Romans 1:3 And 2 Corinthians 5:16.)]

▮ 171. - 1 Peter 4:14

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. [NASB]

Here, surely, any writer would want to remind his readers that Jesus himself had called them "blessed" who suffered such persecution: "How blest you are, when you suffer insults and persecution and every kind of calumny for my sake" (Mt. 5:11).

▮ 172. - 1 Peter 5:1

And now I appeal to the elders of your community, as a fellow-elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings, and also a partaker in the splendor that is to be revealed. [NEB]

If this were Peter writing, or even someone writing in his name who knew of him as Jesus' chief apostle, he would hardly have characterized him(self) simply as a "fellow-elder" and make no mention of having been a follower of Jesus on earth. Of the latter there can be no knowledge on the part of this writer. If the epistle is being written in Peter's name there would have been even less reason for failing to include this information in a situation where he is "appealing" to the reader. Whether the letter was originally pseudonymous, or whether the ascription to Peter (1:1-2) was added later, it would appear that either of these stages was still prior to the dissemination of the Gospel story. Peter would only have been known as a prominent apostle of the spiritual Christ, as he was known to Paul.

J. N. D. Kelly (characteristically), in his *First Epistle of Peter* (p.198), tries to suggest that this silence on Peter's part is "self-effacement," a playing down of his status so that he can rank himself with the local church leaders. This is clearly special pleading, and hardly convincing, since no one would have considered Peter 'proud' simply for stating his role in Jesus' ministry, especially if the "witness" reference were to be taken as an eyewitness to the sufferings mentioned. Again, the power of authority and status in urging a course of action upon the reader would have been the overriding consideration.

In regard to that "witness," the word used is "*martus*." Some try to see this as having the meaning of 'eyewitness,' others interpret it as a declaration of faith. I can do no better than to quote the conservative Kelly, in his opinion (*op.cit.*, p.198) on the matter: "The obvious and straightforward interpretation of this might seem to be that he has been an eyewitness of the Lord's passion, and as such is qualified to hold up His patient endurance of suffering as an example. But although many understand the phrase so, we should hesitate to follow them. Not only is the motive alien to the context, but Peter could hardly be described as having been in any strict sense a spectator of the passion. Properly speaking, *martus* [as does the related verb, *martureo*] denotes one who testifies rather than an eyewitness, and it is frequently applied in the NT to people who proclaim, and so bear witness to, Jesus."

Kelly goes on to suggest that the underlying meaning goes even further: that 'Peter' is a "martyr" in the sense that he has suffered himself, in a persecutory sense, on account of the testimony to Christ that he gives. This 'martyr' meaning is, of course, the one which the word *martus* eventually took on in the Christian context. All of this further removes the thought from any sense of eyewitness.

We can also bring the 'witness' of the entire epistle to bear on interpreting this passage. Our survey of the letter shows that Peter never speaks in terms of eyewitness. He fails to refer to

Jesus' teachings in key arguments where an appeal to them would be most natural. He has not even an allusion to make about the bodily resurrection or the eyewitness of followers to the risen Christ in flesh. Rather his faith, and even his knowledge of Christ's passion, comes from the scriptures, as 2:22-3 illustrates.

¶ 173. - 1 Peter 5:4

And when the chief Shepherd is manifested (or, revealed), you will obtain the unfading crown of glory. [RSV]

Peter, of all people, would surely have instinctively expressed the idea of Christ's "return." Instead the writer speaks only of Christ's 'revelation,' in the same way that all the epistle writers convey the idea that Christ is a revealed entity whose first appearance is yet to come, that he will first manifest himself to the eye of the world only at the imminent End-time.

[In This Particular Reference To The Parousia, It Is Impossible For Commentators To Use A Common 'Out' To Get Around The Silence About A 'Return' Of Jesus. They Often Rationalize That Writers Speak Of The *coming* Of Christ And Not His *return* Because They Are Referring To The Exalted Christ Who, When Previously On Earth, Had Not Yet Been Exalted, And So, Strictly Speaking, By Splitting Semantic Hairs, It Could Be Said That The Exalted Christ Would Not Be Spoken Of As 'Returning' To Earth, But Only Coming For The First Time. (One Wonders If All The New Testament Writers Who So Express Themselves Were Capable Of, Or Would Have Been Concerned With, Such Peculiar Nicety Of Expression.) But Here In 1 Peter 5:4, The Opposite Is The Case. A Notable Gospel Image Of Jesus In His Earthly Career, In His Teaching And Ministry To The Poor And The Sick, Is The Image Of The Shepherd (John Calls Him The Good Shepherd). In Using This Term, The Writer Of This Epistle Would Have Had Every Justification—One Might Say, Every Impulse—to Express The Idea Of 'Return.']

¶ 174. - 1 Peter 5:5-6

⁵ . . . *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. "*⁶*Humble yourselves then under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. [RSV]*

Like James, the writer of this epistle appeals to the thought that the mighty lack God's favor and the humble receive it, and he expresses the idea that a reversal of this fortune is to be expected. Yet, like James, we receive no indication that the writer is aware of Jesus' own teaching on this matter: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt. 23:12).

2 Peter

¶ 175. - 2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and true religion [literally, godliness], enabling us to know the One who called us by his own splendor and might. [NEB]

A possibly ambiguous passage, though the overall sense of it, especially within the larger context of 1 and 2 Peter, makes it virtually certain that the "His" at the opening of this verse is a reference to God, and "the One" toward its close is also a reference to God. (Compare the latter with the phrase in 1 Peter 1:15: "The One who called you is holy" which is without question referring to God: see above #162). J. N. D. Kelly (*The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.300) opts for the meaning of God in the phrase "His divine power," though he points out that some take it as Christ's. Ironically, Kelly opines, "One is tempted to think the author had not sorted the matter out clearly in his own mind," illustrating the perplexity which many scholars feel in the face of a silence like this.

In fact, this verse contains a dual void in the thinking of the author. He first says that it is God who has bestowed "everything that makes for life and godliness," an astonishing statement. Had not Jesus made some contribution to the attainment of life and godliness and would that not be a natural thought of any Christian writer? The bestowal of these things by God, he goes on to say, has enabled the believer to know God himself, as the One who has called the Christian. Amazingly, Jesus is not envisioned as having made that call (an omission reinforced by 1:10: "exert yourselves to clinch God's choice and calling of you").

The writer, in the next verse (4), speaks of God, through his might and splendor, as the one who "has given us his promises, great beyond price," and again we wonder at the absence of any thought that Jesus, too, had made promises in his ministry, about God and about the future.

¶ 176. - 2 Peter 1:16-18

¹⁶It was not on tales artfully spun that we relied when we told (gnoridzo) you of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming (parousia); we saw him with our own eyes [literally, we became eyewitnesses] in majesty, ¹⁷when at the hands of God the Father he was invested with honor and glory, and there came to him from the sublime Presence a voice which said: 'This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favor rests.' ¹⁸This voice from heaven we ourselves heard; when it came we were with him on the sacred mountain. [NEB]

This passage is often referred to as the "Transfiguration" scene, since it bears a strong resemblance to the Gospel incident as recorded in Mark 9:28, Matthew 17:1-8, Luke 9:28-36. But is 2 Peter's account based on the memory of such an historical incident in Jesus' ministry, or upon the tradition as presented in a written Gospel?

There are significant missing details. No mention is made of the perceived presence of Elijah and Moses, no mention of the brightening of Jesus' clothes or face. The epistle does not record Peter's suggestion that a tabernacle be set up. Nor does it supply any setting for this incident, neither in Galilee nor indeed within an earthly ministry of Jesus. All these things have to be read into the epistle's account—and often are.

Taken by itself, with no preconceptions brought to it, the account in 2 Peter sounds like an epiphany, a visionary experience attributed to the apostle Peter and unnamed others. "We saw him with our own eyes in majesty" does not suggest that they had earlier that day been walking about with him as Jesus of Nazareth. There is no implication of a *change* in Jesus' state or appearance. Rather, they have received a vision of the Lord whom they worship and whose arrival in glory (the *Parousia*) they are awaiting. The writer offers this vision as 'proof' to the readers (some of whom have expressed skepticism) that this divine Son is powerful and blessed by God, that he is present among them and is indeed coming.

Certain Gospel preconceptions have been brought to the NEB translation, as is the case with most translations. Rather than the "honor and glory" being a separate event, implying a change of appearance, the Greek has the honor and glory bestowed by the divine words themselves. The Greek of verse 18 limits the "while we were with him" to this hearing of God's voice, not the entire event, which implies that the "with him" only became operative once the epiphany had taken place, ruling out a broader reference to the apostles being in Jesus' company prior to his 'transfiguration' experience.

In any case, we must ask, if the writer knows the Gospel tradition and is seeking to provide proof of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, why does he not appeal to an incident Peter himself had witnessed which was far more dramatic than a supposed transfiguration in appearance: namely, Jesus rising from death? The post-resurrection appearances, including to Peter, could have been thrown in as well. What better way to illustrate the promise of eternal life (1:11)? (Scholars have asked these questions, too, in some perplexity.)

The word for "eyewitnesses" is *epoptai*, which is also used of the higher grade initiates in the Greek mystery cults who had experienced the perceived presence of the god. There is a high scriptural content in this passage as well. The overall atmosphere is of a typical Old Testament theophany of God; the voice from heaven is the well-known verse from Psalm 2; "honor and glory" echo Psalm 8:5; and "on the holy mountain" suggests Psalm 2:6's "on Zion his holy mountain." Not only is the writer describing a revelatory experience attributed to Peter, he must construct it out of scriptural pieces (in the fashion of midrash), presumably because no memory or exact tradition about such a Petrine vision was available.

A fuller discussion of this passage in 2 Peter (taken with verse 19: see next item) can be found in Supplementary Article No. 7: Transfigured on the Holy Mountain: The Beginnings of Christianity.

¶ 177. - 2 Peter 1:19

All this only confirms for us the message of the prophets, to which you will do well to attend, because it is like a lamp shining in a murky place, until the day breaks and the morning star rises to illuminate your minds.

The writer concludes this passage with a statement that would be astonishing had he really been recounting a Gospel incident; instead, it illuminates the real nature of that experience. The vision of Jesus in majesty is said to "confirm the message of the prophets." Would an event in the ministry of Jesus be offered as something *secondary* to the promise contained in the scriptures? Would those scriptures be described as "a lamp shining in a murky place" until the Parousia arrives, ignoring the light cast by Jesus' own presence on earth as teacher, miracle-worker, prophet of the future, dying and rising from death?

Instead, the writer of this epistle is presenting Peter's vision as a corroboration for the primary testimony about Jesus and the hope of his coming: the Jewish scriptures. There can have been no experience of Jesus himself on earth prior to or subsequent to this vision. This epiphany of the Christ they awaited confirmed his presence, his power, his imminent arrival, and has given a boost to a faith that was first and foremost dependent on an interpretation of the sacred writings. Even a decade or so into the second century (which is when scholars tend to date 2 Peter), a Christian writer shows no sign of believing in an historical Jesus.

¶ 178. - 2 Peter 2:1

But false prophets also arose among the people [of Israel], just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies. They will go so far as to deny the Master who acquired [lit., bought] them for his own. [NASB/NAB]

Did not Jesus warn his disciples that "Imposters will come claiming to be messiahs or prophets, and they will produce signs and wonders to mislead God's chosen" (Mk. 13:22)? One of the common tendencies of sectarian groups is to try to neutralize the development of heresies in their midst (and to demonize the heretics) by claiming that the founder of the movement had foretold that very thing. The writer here can make mention of "the Master" who has gained their allegiance, but not as the source of any teaching or prophecy. "*Despotes*" (Master) is a word meaning "lord, sovereign, a master, especially of slaves" and is often used of God himself. It conveys no sense of a simple human teacher.

¶ 179. - 2 Peter 3:2

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. [NIV]

Again the writer seems to lack any awareness of prophecies spoken by Jesus himself. And when the idea finally appears that anything had actually come from Jesus, it is said to be "through your apostles." The latter phrase is not likely to be employed when speaking of teachings pronounced by Jesus on earth, since everything of that nature would naturally be regarded as coming to later generations through community leaders and apostles. Rather, the thought suggests that the Lord and Savior is speaking through revelation to those apostles, and they in turn are passing on the perceived communication from him to the community.

¶ 180. - 2 Peter 3:3-4

³*Note this first: in the last days there will come men who scoff at religion and live self-indulgent lives, ⁴and they will say: 'Where now is the promise of his coming? Our fathers have been laid to their rest, but still everything continues exactly as it has always been since the world began.'* [NEB]

Detractors and scoffers have been questioning the veracity of the expected Parousia. Would not a natural recourse have been to appeal to Jesus' personal promises? Mark 9:1 has him say: "I tell you this: there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God already come in power." In fact, why do the scoffers not raise the whole question of Jesus' promises? Why is there not a debate in the community over the accuracy and

dependability of those promises, especially if (as the letter suggests) a sufficient period of time has elapsed that they may be reasonably called into question?

Nor is it possible, along modern scholarly lines, to suggest that such promises are not 'authentic' to Jesus but were attributed to him later. If the Gospel communities could make such an attribution, how likely that the community of 2 Peter had not done the same? In fact, on something as important as the 'return' of Jesus at the End-time, no Christian community could have *failed* to develop the tradition that he had personally promised to return, whether authentic or not. Such promises seem outside the ken of this writer's circle.

Another omission is evident here. Where is the Son of Man? The Gospels (and even Q) are focused on the arrival or return of Jesus in his role *as the Son of Man*, a figure derived from Daniel 7. Why do none of the epistles, which are also saturated with the idea of the imminent End-time and arrival of the Christ, make no mention of such a figure or identity for Jesus? Why, if this focus on the Son of Man was a reality of the Gospel world, do all the epistles and their communities seem completely ignorant of it?

¶ 181. - 2 Peter 3:10

But the Day of the Lord will come; it will come, unexpected as a thief. [NEB]

Jesus' warning recorded in Matthew 24:43, that one must be on guard at all times since it is not known "at what watch of the night the thief will come," is one of his more memorable prophecies about the End. Paul, too, expresses himself in similar phrases (1 Thessalonians 5:2), yet neither he nor the writer of 1 Peter (nor, as we shall see, the author of Revelation) links such a warning or image with Jesus' own teaching on the matter. Neither one of them, as well, introduces the figure of the Son of Man, the centerpiece of the discussion in Matthew and its parallels.

1 & 2 John, Jude, Plus Revelation

1 John

▮ 182. - 1 John 1:1-4

¹What was from the beginning; what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life—²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. [NASB]

This is a curious epistle. Its contradictions have threatened to drive commentators "to despair" (to quote J. H. Houlden's phrase). Its meanings are often murky. It is devoid of any Gospel atmosphere, any echoes of Gospel events, any Gospel teachings of Jesus. It is largely theocentric, with Christ an oblique figure, one spoken of (as so many epistles do) as being "manifested," presented in mystical ways. There is no direct reference to the cross or to Calvary, and none at all to the resurrection. The oft-quoted 3:16 simply states that Christ "laid down his life for us," with "life" rendered by the word "*psychê*" which can have a meaning of 'soul' as much as bodily life, and could thus be applicable to a spiritual being (as of God, in Matthew 12:18/Isaiah 42:1). The reference to that 'sacrifice' as a "propitiation" for sin (2:2, 4:10) seems incompatible with other statements which portray Christ as an advocate in heaven, "pleading our cause with the Father" (2:1) but not as a propitiatory sacrifice, or which show no sign of a salvific Son at all, as in 1:9: "if we confess our sins, (God) is just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong."

The two sets of dissidents in chapters 2 and 4 also seem incompatible. The issues and features surrounding these respective disputes are different and cannot be reconciled. There is no apostolic tradition, nothing traced back to Jesus or early apostles; everything is by spirits sent from God, with no sign of even the basic traditions of the Gospel of John, such as Jesus' promise to send the Paraclete after he is gone. Nor is there any sign of the so-called (and unnamed) "beloved disciple" of Jesus found in the Fourth Gospel.

The only solution to all the problems of this epistle is to regard it as a layered document, added to over time, with new ideas and situations set alongside old ones, a process which created inconsistencies and contradictions. Because of its total lack of connection to any elements of the Gospel of John, the epistle must be regarded as earlier, at least in all but perhaps its latest stratum, or as proceeding from a related but separate community to that which produced the Gospel, one that was unaffected for most of its development by the ideas of the Gospel-producing community. These issues are thoroughly discussed in my Supplementary Article No. 2: A Solution to the First Epistle of John.

But let's take a look at the so-called "Prologue" of this epistle, as quoted above, verses 1:1-4. Despite commentators' best efforts to regard this as some kind of description of Jesus and his ministry, based on the eyewitness of apostles like "John," it is better understood as a poetic account of the beginnings of the sectarian group itself, its revelatory experience of God and the eternal life he now offered. The language is that of revelation, the pronouns are neuter. In verse 2, this eternal life was "with/in the Father" and was revealed. Only the most forced 'reading into' could render this a reference to Jesus of Nazareth and his life on earth; rather, "life" is a spiritual benefit that God has created for believers and which he has now disclosed. In fact, the pointed absence in this key sentence of any reference to the Son or his identification with the process of

salvation, makes the one appearance of the Son in this Prologue—at the end of verse 3—look all the more like a tacked-on idea, introduced when the concept of the Son had developed at a later stage of the community's thinking and began to be introduced at different spots into the basic, earlier stratum of the document. Indeed, the entire first section of the epistle (to 2:17) has only a handful of references to the Son, many of which seem incidental or inconsistent with the context, and is otherwise entirely theocentric. The series of metrical lines in 2:12-14, concerned with sin and mastery over Satan, is solely focused on God. The "light" as opposed to the darkness found beyond the sect, is solely identified with God, and so on.

¶ 183. - 1 John 2:7-8 / (2:6)

⁷*Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.* ⁸*On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. [NASB]*

In all this talk about "commandments" both here and throughout 1 & 2 John, there is no suggestion that any of this ethical teaching came from Jesus, on earth or in heaven. The command to love one another is said to have been given to the community at its "beginning," meaning the revelatory experience described in the Prologue. It was part of the message from God "heard" by the community at that time, not one passed on from Jesus through oral tradition. Most like to take the "in Him" of verse 8 as a reference to Christ, but "Him" in previous verses has always referred to God, and the succeeding reference to "light" casts its gleam back onto that pronoun, and the author has stated clearly that "God is light" (1:5). Besides, the commandment's source has been, and will continue to be, identified as God, not Christ.

[The Passage Quoted Above Is Preceded By One Of The Two References In The Epistle—The Other Being 3:16—Which Might Be Regarded As Implying Christ's Presence On Earth: "Whoever Claims To Be Dwelling In Him (God) Ought To Conduct Himself As Christ (*ekeinos*) Did [Literally, Ought To Walk As Christ ("That One") Himself Walked]" (2:6). First Of All, Was This Thought Part Of The Original Context? The Preceding Verses Speak Of Knowing God By Keeping His Commands; The Following Verses 7-8 (Above) Again Speak Of The Commands Of God, Old And New, Known From The "Beginning." If 2:6 Were Original, Referring To The Ethical Behavior And Teachings Of Jesus While On Earth, It Is Curious That Neither Before Nor After Would The Writer Bring In Those Teachings As The Standard For Knowing God And Keeping His Commands.

The Other Curious Feature Is That 2:6 Does Not Refer To Christ Or Jesus By Name. Here, As In Several Other Places In The Epistle (3:3, 5, 7, 16, 4:17), The Son Is Referred To By The Demonstrative Pronoun "*ekeinos*," Meaning "That One." No One Has Provided A Convincing Explanation For This Peculiar Mode Of Expression. My Own Feeling Is That It Began As A Way Of Referring To A Specific Part Of God, That Emanation Of Him Which Served As An Intermediary, The Spiritual Son. It Has An Impersonal Character Out Of Keeping With The Idea Of A Recent Historical Person Or Distinct Human Personality. Raymond E. Brown (*The Epistles of John*, P.249) Acknowledges, Along With Other Scholars, That In This Epistle There Is Often "No Sharp Distinction Between God And Christ." This Produces An Occasional Confusion As To Which Figure Is Being Referred To. This Would Support My Contention That Both God And Christ Are Closely Linked Spiritual Entities, Lacking The Distinction That Would Emerge If Christ Had Been A Recent Historical Man. 1 John 3:16 Is Not "Christ Laid Down His Life For Us," As Most

Translations Render It, But "That One Laid Down His Life For Us," With The Name Jesus Or Christ Nowhere In The Vicinity.

We Might Also Note That In 4:17, The Writer Compares The Believer's Behavior With *ekeinos* By Saying That "We Are As That One *is*," Not "*was*." Compare The Similar Present Tense In 3:3, Where The Exemplary Christ ("That One") "*is* Pure," And The Passage Under Discussion (2:8 Above), If The "In Him" Were A Reference To Christ, As Some Claim. Christ Would Seem To Be A Model Who Exists In A Timeless State, Both Past And Present, Implying A Spiritual Entity, Not A Recent Historical One. If 2:6 Is A Late Insertion, It May Reflect A General Sense That Christ Had At Some Time Come To Earth (Compare The Dispute In 4:1f, Below) But Little Was Known Of Such A Coming. Or It Might Still Be An Expression Of Mythical Thinking In Regard To Christ's Activities. The Reference Is In The Context Of Christ Providing An Example Or Precedent, A Universal Feature Of The Relationship Between Mythical Gods And Present Societal Practice.]

¶ 184. - 1 John 2:27

But as for you, the initiation (lit., anointing) which you received from him stays with you; you need no other teacher, but learn all you need to know from his initiation, which is real and no illusion. As he/it taught you, then, dwell in him/it. [NEB]

A most revealing silence. The "initiation" (anointing, *chrisma*) seems to be a rite for entry into the sect. In 2:20 it is referred to as "the gift of the Holy One," which is a reference to God, a gift by which "you have all knowledge." Here in 2:27, all that the believer needs to know is said to be gained by this initiation ceremony, which pointedly excludes all teachings and example that might have come from Jesus' ministry. No Christian writer who possessed any information whatever derived from Jesus through oral or apostolic tradition—or even the barest idea of such—could possibly have made this declaration.

¶ 185. - 1 John 2:28

Even now, my children, dwell in him, so that when he appears [lit., is manifested] we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (Parousia).

Is this a reference to Christ's Parousia, his arrival or 'second' coming? Or is it to the Parousia of God, the traditional Jewish expectation of the Day of the Lord? Scholarship has striven to make it the former, but this involves considerable manhandling of the text.

The exhortation at the beginning of the verse, to "dwell in him," should logically be a reference to God, since the 'dwelling in him' of the preceding verse (see previous item) follows on the reference to God's initiation, or anointing. The "he" of verse 28 goes on in verse 29 to be applied to the one of whom every believer is a "child," and this reference is made clear by the following "God's children" in 3:1. The sequence of thought, therefore, is an unbroken and unmistakable reference to God, and the "coming" is that of God.

Verse 3:2 goes on to reiterate this meaning: "Here and now, dear friends, we are God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when it is disclosed (or, when he

appears) we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (NEB). There can be no doubt that the expected Parousia is that of God.

The measure of what is at stake here is seen in Raymond E. Brown's desperate attempt (*op.cit.* p.379) to read verse 29's "his child" as meaning a child of Christ, even in the face of the "God's children" in the next verse and elsewhere (eg, 3:9). Brown's justification for doing so (as was Brooke's in the 1912 International Critical Commentary) is his assumption, determined of course by the Gospels, that the "his coming" in verse 28 must be a reference to *Christ's* Parousia, which would then govern the meaning of the "his" child in verse 29.

Why is this need so critical? Because if this is in fact a reference to the coming of God and not Jesus, this puts 1 John into a 'Christian' milieu which is not what one would expect in the orthodox stream of things. If these are believers in Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified and resurrected Messiah, why do they *not* have the expectation of his Second Coming? Why *is* there no reference to Jesus as judge or ruler upon his return? 3:2 shows that the focus of this entire section of the letter is on God. We are God's children and our destiny is to be like him (God) when he appears or when everything is revealed. In the mind of the writer (of these early strata of the epistle), Christ the Son occupies a subsidiary, accessory position; he is a channel only, a spiritual force. He is given no role commensurate with the Gospel picture of him. Intimations of such a role creep in only at other points, in strata which have all the marks of later insertions, and even here, there is no clear placement of him on earth.

1 John, in those strata that have been laid over a bedrock layer with no Son at all (see Supplementary Article No. 2), is an example of fledgling and evolving "Christ belief." For this sect, Christ began as a manifestation of God, God's point of contact with humanity, the channel through which God is known (see 5:20), one who comes with the Spirit through the sect's ritual sacraments (see 5:6). Soon he was taking on concepts of being a heavenly advocate (2:1), then a propitiation for sin (2:2), serving as an example of good behavior (2:6) and laying down his life/spirit for the believer (3:16). All this knowledge about the Christ was a product of revelation, as we can see in the next item.

¶ 186. - 1 John 3:5...8

You know that he (Christ, ekeinos) was revealed in order to take away sins, and there is no sin in him. . . The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.
[Translator's New Testament]

Lapsing into that most universal manner of expression found in the epistles, the writer declares that the Son "was revealed" by God for purposes of salvation. The verb here is the passive of *phaneroô*, which hardly conveys the coming of the Son to earth and acting in his own person in a life of teaching and self-sacrifice. In fact, there is a notable lack of any implication of death or resurrection in these verses, implying that the Son was at this stage not conceived of as dying, let alone rising. That conception comes, partially, only in 3:16.

¶ 187. - 1 John 3:11

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. [NASB]

As we have seen above (#182 and 183), the idea of 'hearing from the beginning' refers to the revelation the group received at its formation, not to anything concerning teachings of a Jesus passed on through apostolic tradition. That revelation came from God and was about eternal life, and it seems also, to judge by this verse, to have included the injunction to love one another. In many other passages, the love command is said to have come from God.

Yet how could the Johannine community not have inherited the tradition, or developed its own artificial one, that Jesus himself while on earth had taught about loving one another? Right in the Gospel of John we encounter such teachings, aimed at the community of Jesus' followers: "I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another" (13:34-5), or "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love, as I have heeded my Father's commands and dwell in his love" (15:9-10). How could the community and the writer of 1 John not be saturated in these ideas, constantly pointing to Jesus as the source of such teachings and the prime example for their practice? The answer is that the construction of the Fourth Gospel's Jesus came only later. The teachings previously ascribed to God and revelation were placed in the mouth of an allegorical Jesus of Nazareth, borrowed from the groundbreaking creation of the writer of Mark and imposed upon the theological outlook of the Johannine circle of belief about a spiritual Son.

¶ 188. - 1 John 3:16

It is by this that we know what love is: that Christ (ekeinos, that one) laid down his life for us. And we in our turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers. [NEB]

This declaration is painfully out of place here, for the text goes on in verse 17 to descend with a dull thud from this lofty idea to the remark that if a man has enough to live on he should give to a brother in need. The latter verse, in its tone and motifs, follows on logically from verses 14 and 15. Some scholars (eg, Houlden, Grayston) have recognized the unhappy sequence of ideas here, but they need to be more courageous in their implication that 3:16 may have been lacking in earlier versions of the text.

As an injunction, 3:16 is surely to be regarded as the most significant in all the epistle's thinking. And yet, not even here can the writer be drawn into quoting a teaching of Jesus on the subject, not even from the traditions which presumably went into the Gospel which his own community eventually produced. In John 15:13-14, we read, as spoken by Jesus: "There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you." Is it conceivable that the epistle writer would declare the necessity to "lay down our lives for our brothers" without appealing to Jesus' own powerful injunction to do that very thing? Rather, we need to see the saying in the Gospel as an invention, words that were accorded to Jesus based upon the earlier statement of principle, unattributed to anyone, found in the epistle. The same observation could be made about Jesus' saying in 10:11, about the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. These silences in the epistle also allow us to conclusively state that the Gospel of John could not possibly have preceded the epistle and been known to the writer, as many scholars continue to claim.

We might note that in this allusion to a sacrificial death for Jesus in 1 John, there is no hint of what that death might have consisted of, or its soteriological nature. The image of the "cross" is entirely absent from this epistle, as is any atonement doctrine. The idea of sacrificing one's life for one's fellows is not confined to Christianity, and was in fact widespread in ancient philosophy.

¶ 189. - 1 John 3:21-24

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them. [NIV]

Scholars recognize that the "as he commanded us" in verse 23 could, in grammatical terms, refer to either God or Christ. But other statements in this epistle about the source of the love command, as well as in 2 John, do not allow for such an ambiguity. In the above passage, verse 22 refers to keeping *God's* commands, and verse 24, which refers back to that ambiguous pronoun, contains the idea of 'dwelling in him,' which analysis of 3:27-28 has identified as an idea relating to God. Loving one another has also been identified as part of the revelation from God at the sect's "beginning" (as in 3:11). And reference to the love command in 4:21 and 2 John 4-6 (see below) make it clear that it is God who is in mind as the source.

Another silence here is the failure to refer to Jesus' teaching about praying to God, that if one asks, one shall receive. Not only is this advice well-known from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:7), it is particularly pervasive in the Gospel of John, with the focus shifted to asking Jesus: "If you ask anything in my name I will do it" (14:15); "Ask what you will, and you shall have it" (15:7); "...so that the Father may give you all that you ask in my name" (15:16). It would be difficult to understand why the writer would consistently fail to appeal to such injunctions from Jesus himself if they were a part of the Johannine traditions.

But perhaps the most telling feature of this passage is the command in verse 23: "to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ." A divine name contained mystical, magical properties. Revelation of that name gave access to the deity's attention and powers. It was part of the knowledge about him that the believer and miracle-worker sought. Through access to the name, they became intimate with him, protected and blessed by him. To "believe in" a deity's name was to believe in his existence, to acknowledge his role in the scheme of faith and salvation, to make a personal commitment to him. The point is, such language best fits the community's belief in Jesus as a spiritual force, a deity beside God in heaven, who has acted entirely in that supernatural world, as God himself does and every other mythical deity believed in at that time. It hardly seems a natural or appropriate style of expression about a recent historical man who had done his work on earth. One might rather expect that the 'command' of God would have been to believe that Jesus of Nazareth had been God's Son and Christ and that his death on Calvary and rising from the tomb had bestowed salvation. But this atmosphere is entirely missing from the Johannine epistles.

¶ — 1 John 4:1-3 - See "Top 20" #15

¶ 190. - 1 John 4:4 . . . 6

⁴ But you, my children, are of God's family, and you have the mastery over these false prophets, because he who inspires you is greater than he who inspires the godless world. . . . ⁶ But we belong to God, and a man who knows God listens to us, while he who does not belong to God refuses us a hearing. That is how we distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. [NEB]

Following on the 4:1-3 passage ("Top 20" #15), the writer reiterates the principle of who has a pipeline to the truth, how the community is to distinguish truth from error. In verse 2 he has said that those who acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh—which would seem to be a statement that the divine Son had come to earth, a belief apparently not held by those he is condemning—are in possession of the true spirit from God, while those who do not so acknowledge have received 'spirits' not from God and are "Antichrist." In the succeeding verses above, he again speaks of "spirits" of truth and of error.

For this community, all information and faith have come through revelation from God. No one appeals to anything Jesus might have said or done, to oral traditions about his life, not even to the concept of Jesus having promised and sent the definitive Spirit in the form of the Paraclete, an essential element of the Gospel of John. It would be difficult to envision a Christian movement originating in the person and followers of Jesus, spreading outward from a single center, which would arrive at the end of the century in a community like that of this epistle and yet not evidence the slightest concept of apostolic tradition.

¶ 191. - 1 John 4:12

Though God has never been seen by any man, God himself dwells in us if we love one another. [NEB]

An odd thought, that God has never been seen by any man. Jesus of Nazareth may have been viewed as *more* than a man, but he had presumably been a human who walked the earth and who was seen as coming from heaven, and to that extent, God had indeed been seen by at least one man.

¶ 192. - 1 John 4:14-15 / (5:1)

¹⁴ And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. [NASB]

The epistles are full of the expression that God "sent" the Son, often (as here) in the perfect tense, which can have more of a present implication than a past one. It is the same verb as employed in the "sending" of the Holy Spirit. The consequence of both those sendings is expressed in terms of the present time rather than of some set of past, historical events.

In verse 15, the confession is in the present tense. Jesus *is* the Son of God, not that a certain historical man *was* the Son of God. Like the description of the first set of dissenters in 2:22f—"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?"—this is a faith declaration about an existing entity, not about the identity of a past historical man. 2:22 is usually interpreted in the latter sense, a denial that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, but when Gospel

preconceptions are set aside, such an interpretation can be seen not to work. These "deniers" are still part of the Christian community. "You no less than they are among the initiated" (2:20, NEB). If the opponents denied Jesus' Messiahship, they would no longer be Christians. Rather, the expression in both passages (to which compare Romans 10:8-9) is a confession of faith *in* this deity, a deity who is the Son of God and Savior.

Here in 1 John 4:15, God requires the believer to have faith in the existence and power of his Son (as in the "name" in 3:23 and 5:13), and God will abide in them. This thought, consistently in the present tense, is repeated in 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," and in 5:5, "he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Brooke (International Critical Commentary, *The Epistles of John*, p.128) equates the meaning of "Jesus is Christ" with "Jesus as Christ," demonstrating that this is a faith declaration relating to a present entity in heaven, and not a past one on earth.

¶ 193. - 1 John 5:6-11

⁶*This is the one who came by [through] water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.* ⁷*And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth.* ⁸*For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. [NASB] . . . (continued below)*

There is perhaps no other passage in all the New Testament epistles which gives us a clearer picture of the nature of the early Christian movement, the belief through revelation in a Son and Christ who is God's agent and channel of salvation. Consequently, there are few passages in the epistles that are subjected to more tortured interpretation than this one in order to bring it into line with Gospel preconceptions. A good example is *The Translator's New Testament*, which takes the phrase "came through water and blood" and offers this elucidation: "That is, through his whole ministry from the baptism to the cross, with all their implications."

But of such Gospel events, or implications, there is no suggestion here. The Gospel of John, in fact, does not even contain a baptism scene. Water as representing the baptism of Jesus can hardly figure in this passage's centrality of argument when it is not even present in the community's ongoing record. Nor is the idea of Christ laying down his life, alluded to in 3:16, associated in this epistle with a death on the cross.

It is sometimes suggested that the "blood" element is a reference to the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal established by Jesus at a Last Supper, but here again, no such Eucharist appears in the Gospel of John, let alone the epistle, and the one eucharistic element (so claimed) in that Gospel relates to 'eating the bread of life' (6:48-51), which is not linked to a Last Supper or sacramental ceremony. The enlargement on that idea in the following verses 51b-56, which adds the dimension of drinking Jesus' blood (though still unlinked to a Last Supper), is judged by some to be a later interpolation, probably by the Roman church, to add the missing eucharistic element (e.g., D. Moody Smith, *Johannine Christianity*, p.19; and Howard M. Teeple, *The Literary Origin of the Gospel of John*, p.85).

The "water" is undoubtedly a reference to the water of baptism, a rite that would have been present within the community and a sacrament which, like all sacraments, served as a channel for the bestowal of divine grace and spiritual benefits on the believers. Paul's discussion in Romans 6:1-4 of his version of Christian baptism (how similar it was to that of the Johannine community cannot be said) shows that such rites enabled the believer to enter into a mystical union with the

deity; they brought the deity into contact with the community, and thus he could be said to have "come" through the water of baptism. The significance of the "blood" is a little more mysterious. J. H. Houlden (*The Johannine Epistles*, p.125) calls both terms "enigmatic." But the blood almost certainly reflects the thought behind those few phrases inserted into the epistle in a later stratum, such as 1:7b, 2:2 and 4:10, the idea that sin has been atoned for "by the blood of Jesus his Son."

One implication in the wording of 5:6, in the writer's insistence that Christ has "come" through the blood as well as the water, is that this point was in dispute within the sect. This supports the idea that the "blood/propitiation" concept is indeed a later stratum of thought, superimposed on an earlier layer which lacked it, and over some opposition. This in itself would nullify the interpretation that the "blood" element is a biographical reference to Jesus' death on the cross, for who would deny that Jesus had been crucified, or that his crucifixion was not a significant element of the picture about him which has come to the community? Nor would anyone tend to deny the historical or sacramental significance of Jesus' establishment of the Eucharist if any such tradition existed.

Rather, those who are 'denying' the blood must be denying its symbolism as a rite or as a theological element; they are denying its connection to the divine Jesus, perhaps denying that the spiritual Son had anything to do with a blood sacrifice. This reveals an evolution of christology and soteriology taking place over time within the community, a debate which seems to be entirely dependent on revelation and which never appeals to historical traditions about Jesus' life or about what earlier apostolic tradition had taught. The Johannine community (or circle of them) lives within its own world, and while drawing on current trends of thought, is essentially independent and self-sufficient.

Verse 7, "And it is the Spirit that bears witness, and the Spirit is the truth," makes it clear that the engine of faith is not apostolic tradition or the record of Jesus' life, but the force of the Spirit, God's revelation directly to the community. The Spirit has provided the sect's confirmation that the rites of water and blood, or the christology inherent in those concepts, is indeed the truth. In verse 8, somewhat inconsistently, the Spirit joins forces with the two elements of water and blood, and all three bear witness to the divine Son. Since the Spirit is here regarded as on a par with those other two elements, and since the Spirit is a revelatory agency, it is hardly likely that "water" and "blood" would be references to historical events, but would also serve to "reveal" the Son and provide a channel to him. This commonality of meaning between all three is further supported when we go on to verses 9 to 11, in which the focus shifts directly onto God.

⁹*Do we not accept human testimony? The testimony of God is much greater: it is the testimony God has given on his own Son's behalf.* ¹⁰*Whoever believes in the Son of God possesses that testimony within his heart. Whoever does not believe God has made God a liar by refusing to believe in the testimony he has given on his own Son's behalf.* ¹¹*The testimony is this: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [NAB]*

God has himself borne witness to his Son through those three avenues, the Spirit, the water and the blood, with the implication that they are all revelatory channels. But what of traditions and memories about Jesus on earth? What of the record of the things he had said and done, transmitted over the intervening generations by apostolic tradition? Why would these not serve as sources of the truth about the Son, as "testimony" to him? The opening sentence of verse 9 does not do this. It is simply a comparative thought to 9b, a general rule: 'We are in the habit of accepting testimony from men (in certain circumstances), are we not? How much more should we not accept *God's* testimony?' The former does not specify witness about the Son, and there is no suggestion that it refers in this one instance to the otherwise missing element in the epistle

about apostolic tradition concerning Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, verse 8 has already enumerated the three sources of knowledge about the Son, and whatever they may mean, an apostolic source is not included.

This sectarian community, like all the other communities of Christ belief springing up in the first century across the eastern half of the Roman empire, has come to the conviction, through perceived revelation by God and the Holy Spirit, that God has a Son, that he is the channel of knowledge about God and the agency and dispenser of God's salvation. Verse 10 above could not state it more clearly, in that belief *in* a Son is the new idea abroad in the world, a Son as yet unidentified with any recent human figure who was regarded as the Son's incarnation. The Son is known only by revelation from God, there has as yet been no witness to the Son by the Son himself, a dimension that comes only with the Gospels. In the world of the epistles, God has provided revelatory evidence that such a spiritual Son exists, and belief in that evidence, says this writer, is the avenue to eternal life.

Once the idea of the Son was let loose, it underwent a fairly rapid evolution. He began as an adjunct to God's own activities, a spiritual channel who, in this community, was soon seen as an "advocate" in heaven, pleading for the forgiveness of sins, then as a propitiation for those sins, through sacrifice— though the nature of that sacrifice seems not to be clearly established in the thought of the epistle. In this latest stratum, however, the epistle has apparently outstripped the Johannine Gospel, which contains little concept of atonement or propitiation, especially in its portrayal of the crucifixion. All this means is that the so-called community of John was not monolithic, and in fact the epistle known as 3 John shows that it comprised a number of congregations at some distance from each other, congregations which seem not always to have been in agreement as to "true" doctrine.

Verse 11 sums up the entire spirit of the age: "(God's) testimony (through revelation) is this: God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son." The religion of the Hellenistic age was the concern for personal salvation and immortality, usually granted through subordinate deities such as those of the mystery cults. In Christianity, that subordinate deity was the Son of the Jewish God, transformed into an expanded and divinized version of the expected Messiah (Christ), and usually given the name "Jesus," meaning Yahweh saves. In line with the dominant philosophical concept of the period, this "Christ Jesus" is God's agent and intermediary, revealed by him through the Holy Spirit. When, through a set of unusual circumstances, that intermediary was brought to earth to do his work "among us" (John 1:14), this Hellenistic-Jewish brand of salvation blew away the competitors and established itself on a 2,000 year run.

¶ 194. - 1 John 5:14-15

¹⁴*We can approach God with confidence for this reason: if we make requests which accord with his will he listens to us;* ¹⁵*and if we know that our requests are heard, we know also that the things we ask for are ours. [NEB]*

While this silence has been noted before, even in this epistle (#189), we might highlight it once again in the light of the thought which leads into it. The writer has just said (5:13) that his letter is addressed to those who "believe in the name of the Son of God." As noted earlier (#189), believing in the "name" of a deity is to draw on his power. What deity who had taught on earth, providing knowledge and insight into God's will and benefits, would not be regarded as having manifested that power through his sayings and deeds? Yet even this all-important question of appealing to God for favors is not supported by pointing to Jesus' own teaching and assurances

on the matter, that one need merely ask something of God—or of himself—and it will be granted.

2 John

¶ 195. - 2 John 4-6

⁴It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. ⁵And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. ⁶And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. [NIV]

This passage makes it unmistakably clear that the command to love has come not from Jesus, but from the Father. Moreover, that command is stated as having originated at the "beginning." Since it comes from the Father, that "beginning" cannot have been in the ministry of Jesus—since in that case it would be stated as coming from him, or at least *through* him—but is an event of revelation, probably lying at the inception of the sect itself.

A point I have made many times before is that if a key doctrine is held by a community, and the founder of that community was a prominent and respected teacher, it is inevitable that the teaching of such a doctrine would soon be attributed to him, regardless of whether he had in fact been its source. Yet none of the issues that are central to the interests of this epistle writer are related in any way to a teaching Jesus, and thus we are entitled to place the highest doubt on, indeed to reject, any knowledge of such a figure on the part of the author's community at this stage. Such a figure would step onto the scene only with the writing of the Fourth Gospel, with its Jesus of Nazareth character a reworking of the Synoptic precedent of Mark's invention, re-suited in the christological garments of the Johannine circle of belief.

Jude

¶ 196. - Jude 1

From Jude, servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those whom God has called, who live in the love of God the Father and in the safe keeping of Jesus Christ. [NEB]

Few scholars today regard this epistle as the product of Jude, apostle and supposedly a sibling of Jesus, first introduced as such in Mark 6:3. But if it had been so authored, or if it were a pseudonymous product written in the name of Jude, with the object of claiming the authority of that figure (perhaps an early apostle of the Christ), or even if such an ascription were added later to an existing letter, there is little conceivable reason why such a writer or editor would not have identified this Jude as the brother of Jesus, if he had been so, and not simply as his servant. It seems clear that, as in the case of the letter of James (#145), no such sibling relationship was known at that time, probably because the idea of an historical Jesus was itself unknown.

¶ 197. - Jude 17

But you, my friends, should remember the predictions made by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the warning they gave you: 'In the final age there will be men who pour scorn on religion, and follow their own godless lusts.'

Throughout the epistles, "apostles" are those like Paul who are proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ, with nothing to suggest that they were followers of a Jesus on earth. They are men who have been inspired by the Spirit to preach this heavenly figure. Although there are no close Gospel parallels to these words or sentiments, the Gospels place many predictions about the final age in Jesus' mouth, some of them of a similar nature, such as Matthew 24:10-12: "Many will lose their faith; they will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many; and as lawlessness spreads, men's love for one another will grow cold." In any case, the point made above in 2 John 4-6 (#195) again applies. Such a prediction, important to the writer and his community, would have gravitated toward Jesus himself and inevitably have been placed in his mouth.

Addendum: The Revelation To John

While not, of course, an epistle, the Book of Revelation falls into that category of early Christian writings which show no knowledge of an historical, Gospel Jesus. The figure of Christ communicates entirely through spiritual or visionary channels, there are no teachings of Jesus offered, no references to miracles or other deeds on earth. The prophet envisions his Christ as having been "dead and came to life again" (2:8), but no circumstances of this dying and rising are ever given. No idea of a bodily resurrection appears. Titles and mythical features given to Christ, such as his identification with the "Lamb" and the "one like a son of man" from Daniel 7, are apocalyptic and messianic motifs longstanding in Jewish thought, and entirely heavenly. (For a full discussion of Revelation's lack of an historical Jesus, see my Supplementary Article No. 11: Revelation: The Gospel According to the Prophet John.)

¶ 198. - Revelation 1:9

I was on the island of Patmos because I had preached God's word and borne my testimony to Jesus [lit., the testimony of Jesus]. [NEB]

The final phrase in this verse is grammatically ambiguous, in that it could mean John's own witness to Jesus, or the witness that Jesus himself bore. Translations render it as the former, or else reflect the ambiguity. In 1:2, on the other hand, John seems to be referring to the latter, saying that he is bearing witness to God's word and to the testimony of Jesus Christ. But the latter, in that case, is clearly a reference to the entire document, Jesus' revelation to the prophet about the coming apocalypse, and this is a "testimony" that has come to him through an angel (1:1), not from any Jesus on earth.

In the above quoted passage (1:9), however, John is referring to his regular preaching message, the one for which he was arrested and exiled. That message is the word of God, not Jesus, and it is a word *about* Jesus, John's testimony *to* him. Since John is concerned with the apocalyptic end or transformation of the world, one would expect that Jesus' own preaching on this subject, as part of his ministry, would have been of intense interest and would have formed part of his picture of the End-time. But Revelation never speaks a word about Jesus' prophetic message on earth, nothing from the Little Apocalypse found in Mark 13, none of the predictions about the coming Son of Man placed in Jesus' mouth in the Gospels. The motif of the "thief who comes at

an unexpected moment" appears in 3:3 and 16:15, but in the former it is part of the visionary Christ's letter dictated to the church at Sardis, and the latter seems to be placed in the mouth of God. There is no suggestion that Jesus had spoken something like it during an earthly ministry. The metaphor was probably common in the prophetic vocabulary of the day.

▮ 199. - Revelation 1:13 And 14:14

I saw . . . among the lamps one like a son of man. / Then as I looked there appeared a white cloud, and on the cloud sat one like a son of man. [NEB]

The use of the phrase "one like a son of man" shows that the author of Revelation knows of no tradition that Jesus on earth had referred to himself this way, for he uses it in the form in which it appears in Daniel 7, not as a title, "*the* Son of Man," which the Gospels apply to Jesus. That an apocalyptically minded prophet like John would not have known of such a term used of Jesus on earth, were the Gospel element historical, is highly unlikely.

▮ 200. - Revelation 12:1-6

¹Next appeared a great portent in heaven, a woman robed with the sun, beneath her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ²She was pregnant, and in the anguish of her labor she cried out to be delivered. ³Then a second portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns; on his heads were seven diadems, ⁴and with his tail he swept down a third of the stars in the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when her child was born he might devour it. ⁵She gave birth to a male child, who is destined to rule all nations with an iron rod. But her child was snatched up to God and his throne; ⁶and the woman herself fled into the wilds, where she had a place prepared for her by God, there to be sustained for twelve hundred and sixty days. [NEB]

Is this passage a highly mythologized rendering of Jesus' birth of Mary and its messianic significance? Perhaps a more telling question would be: if Jesus had indeed been born of the woman Mary, would readers of this document have associated the above passage with her and with Jesus' nativity, however much sensationalized? The answer would undeniably be yes.

And yet, if so, how can the prophet portray a mythologized scene which not only contains no hint of any Nativity element known to us from the Gospels (or of any *unknown* one), but in fact makes no room for a life on earth at all? Here the child is snatched up to heaven immediately after birth, there presumably to await the appointed time when he would "rule all nations with an iron rod." The latter motif shows that this child is to be identified with End-time messianic expectation, but there is no suggestion that he had or would be destined for an incarnated life on earth prior to that time. Indeed, since this is part of a document prophesying what is to come, that birth from the woman robed with the sun is yet to take place; it is not something that has happened in the past.

Like many of the prophet's motifs, this one is fluid and allows for multiple applications. Some identify the woman as an ideal glorified Israel, as in the Zion that gives birth in Isaiah 66:7-8; others see in her the figure of Eve, as in Genesis 3:16. Hellenistic mythology is no doubt present, too, as in the myth of Isis with her newborn Horus fleeing the dragon Typhon, or the similar myth of Apollo and Leto. John the prophet was able to draw on a rich multi-cultural heritage for

his highly charged imagery. But the telling point here is that the one heritage he fails to draw on is the Christian one itself, presuming that Christianity possessed by the end of the first century (Revelation is most often dated around 90 CE) some kind of tradition about a Jesus born of Mary, living a life and conducting a ministry some three-quarters of a century earlier. If it did, the writer would hardly fashion a scene which all of his readers would surely associate with that birth and life and yet leave out any suggestion of this child's sojourn on earth or the things he had performed there which directly related to his apocalyptic picture. This passage alone is sufficient to indicate that John the prophet knew of no historical Jesus.

And so John, like so many of the epistle writers, ends his work (22:20) with an appeal which rings throughout the earliest Christian record, echoed by Paul and others, an appeal to the Christ whom he knows solely through visions and revelations, to "Come, Lord Jesus!" This he cries in response to the Christ who has promised "Yes, I am coming soon!" Neither one of them conveys any sense that this coming one had been here already, recently and in the flesh.

That idea, unknown to the prophet John, lay on the immediate horizon.

Appendix

20 Arguable References To The Gospel Jesus In The New Testament Epistles

Those seeking to discredit the Jesus-as-myth interpretation invariably appeal to a handful of passages in the epistles which would seem to support a human view of Jesus. "Of David's stock," "sprung from Judah," "born of woman," the occasional use of "*anthrôpos*" ("man") and the terms "blood" and "flesh," along with a few other miscellaneous items, are placed on the opposite side of the scale in the expectation that these can counter-balance the vast silence on the Gospel Jesus and events which the Sound of Silence has outlined, and tip the weight in favor of a human Jesus present in the minds of the early epistle writers.

The first thing to notice is that none of these things relate in any direct way to the Gospel character, none of them make reference to specific Gospel events, none locate the figure they refer to in any specific time and place. They are features associated with the Christ being preached by writers like Paul, and if they can be interpreted in alternate ways—such as being dependent on scripture or in keeping with Platonic philosophy—this removes them from any necessity to be applied to a recent human man.

(This is in addition to the three "historical" passages I have regularly addressed as a separate category. 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 is a widely accepted interpolation about "[the Jews] who killed the Lord Jesus," 1 Timothy's reference to Pilate in 6:13 is contained within a second century piece of writing but may also be an interpolation, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul's words of Jesus at the "Lord's Supper," can be interpreted as a mythical scene, one which may have given rise to the Gospel episode. These three will also be included below.)

Almost all of the passages itemized here have been covered to some extent either in the Sound of Silence proper or in various Supplementary Articles. Where that is the case, I will often give only a summary of the argument to be made, and refer the reader to the item or article where fuller discussion can be found. On the other hand, where important issues are concerned, as in the case of a term like "flesh" (as in *kata sarka*), I will make an extended review of the evidence, and even add new material not found elsewhere. In the case of certain terms, I will combine into one item the principal passages where each one appears and address them collectively. In the interests of preserving a continuous discussion of related subjects, the order of the items will not always conform to canonical order.

1. Romans 1:3

[...the Gospel of God, which he announced beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures], the gospel concerning his Son who was descended from the seed of David according to the flesh (kata sarka) . . .

In the "Romans" file, #21, I pointed out that this passage involves a curious silence, in that Paul is saying that God's gospel in the prophets announced not the life of Jesus itself but the gospel about him which Paul proclaims. No life of Jesus seems to have intervened between the prophets' forecast and the discovery of that gospel in scripture by Paul.

And what of the reference to Christ being of David's stock? Paul says that he got this information from the prophets. It was part of God's gospel about his Son, as announced in the sacred writings. The scriptures, of course, contained several passages prophesying some future king and anointed one who would be descended from David, and they had to be applied to any belief in a Christ/Messiah, no matter what his nature. Paul makes no reference here to an historical

tradition, nor is any link made with a recent human man. This is a feature which Paul has given the Son because of those passages from scripture. Can such a feature be applied to a spiritual Son in heaven, at least in minds like Paul's?

Considering that Platonic philosophy envisioned that all things on earth were copies of primary archetypes in heaven, the answer is yes. Even Jewish thought contained the idea that elements on earth mirrored ones in heaven, such as the earthly temple and the earthly Jerusalem having heavenly counterparts, or the righteous saints on earth having a heavenly paradigm and champion in the person of the Messiah and Son of Man who appears in the Similitudes of Enoch (indicating that some Jews *did* have a concept of a spiritual Messiah). Thus it was very possible for Paul to envision his heavenly Son and Christ as one who bore a spiritual relationship to David—even if he may not have fully understood how.

The fullest discussion of the Romans 1:1-4 passage can be found in Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ As "Man": Does Paul Speak of Jesus as an Historical Person? See also No. 5 below for a discussion of the use of the term "flesh" as in verse 3's *kata sarka*.

2. Romans 3:24-25 ("blood")

. . . (all) are freely justified by his [God's] grace through his redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation, through faith in his blood [i.e., his sacrificial death]. . .

. . . plus other references to Jesus' "blood" sacrifice, as in:

Ephesians 1:7, 1 Corinthians 11:25, Hebrews 2:14 And Chapters 8 & 9

Some of the myths of the Greek savior gods involved the concept of dying and sacrifice, including references to blood. Rituals and sacred meals of these cults made reference to the blood of the god (or in the case of Mithras, that of the bull he slew). This "blood" was not regarded as historical or earthly, and neither need we view that of Christ in the thinking of the earliest Christians. That blood could be spiritual and function in the upper world can be seen in the elaborate theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which (chapters 8 and 9) Christ as High Priest makes a sacrifice of his own blood in the heavenly sanctuary, with no reference to a shedding of blood on earth, let alone on Calvary.

3. Romans 5:15 (Christ as man, "*anthrôpos*")

For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [referring to Adam], how much more did God's grace and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.

. . . plus 1 Corinthians 15:21:

For since by a man [no verb] death, by a man also [no verb] the resurrection of the dead.

. . . plus 1 Corinthians 15:47:

The first man [Adam] was of the earth, the second man [Christ] is of the heavenly.

. . . plus 1 Timothy 2:5:

For there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus, himself man. [NEB]

The reference in 1 Timothy can be regarded as based on the Pauline precedent. The Pauline comparison between Adam and Christ, spanning two epistles, is designed to contrast the "man" who brought sin into the world and the "man" who has taken it away. Paul is making an antithetical or "type-antitype" comparison. He needs to present a counterpart relationship. There

is no need to regard the two "*anthrôpos*" elements as identical in nature, and in fact the salvation system of the mystery cult ethos requires that one be spiritual, the other material. Can a divine being be referred to as "Man"? In Hellenistic philosophy this is certainly the case. For example, consider Philo's discussion of "Heavenly Man":

"There are two kinds of men. The one is Heavenly Man, the other earthly. The Heavenly Man being in the image of God has no part in corruptible substance, or in any earthly substance whatever; but the earthly man was made of germinal matter which the writer [of Genesis] calls "dust." For this reason he does not say that the Heavenly Man was created, but that he was stamped with the image of God, whereas the earthly man is a creature and not the offspring of the Creator." (From *Allegorical Interpretation of the Law*)

Look closely at 1 Corinthians 15:47, quoted above. Similar to Philo, Paul makes a clear distinction in nature between Adam, who is made of "earthly" material, and Christ who is made of "heavenly" material. He has already noted (verse 46) his basic contrast between the physical and the spiritual, between Adam and Christ. Following that sequence—meant to parallel the resurrection of the (human) body—he declares that the order is the physical body first, then the spiritual. Adam is physical, Christ is spiritual, and the latter will be the prototype for the resurrected bodies of men and women. Nowhere does Paul specify that the spiritual body of Christ he has in mind is the one he assumed after his resurrection, or when he reached heaven. That is always read into the meaning, or even into the translation (as in most translations of verse 45). Paul's two sorts of "man" are clearly *not* the same.

Note the earlier 15:21. Here translators tend to fill in verbs which are Gospel-oriented, assigning the second man (Christ) to the past, as in "for since by a man came death, by a man also came resurrection of the dead." But the following verse points to a future effect, and we may read the second phrase of verse 21 as lacking any past association: "by a man also will come (or has come, now) resurrection of the dead." Paul conveys no identifiable sense that this second man, in contrast to Adam, belongs to earth or to past history.

For a full discussion of these "*anthrôpos*" passages in Paul, see Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ As "Man". See also the "1 & 2 Corinthians" file, #54.

4. Romans 8:3 ("send" / "likeness")

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin.

The concept that the Son had been "sent" into the world is common in the epistles, just as we find the same idea applied to the Holy Spirit which has been sent to inspired apostles, as in **1 Peter 1:12**. (That "sending" of the Spirit is also promised by Jesus in the Gospel of John.) Early Christians believed that the newly-revealed Christ was now present within themselves and was manifesting himself through them. (Compare the idea of "in Christ" which Paul regularly expresses: see "1 & 2 Corinthians" #55.) In **Galatians 4:4-6**, Paul says that God has sent his Son, but then clarifies that "sending" by stating (the same verb) that God has sent *the spirit of his Son* into our hearts (verse 6; see "Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians" #69). On Galatians 4:4-6, see below, No. 11).

The idea of "likeness" is a key element here. This is a recurring concept in the early Christian record. **Philippians 2:6-11**, a christological hymn, says three times in succession that Jesus, a

divine entity in heaven who shared God's own nature, took on the form/fashion/likeness of a man. Never does the epistolary record say directly that he *became* a man, much less that he led a life on earth, or give us details of such a life. Consider the (probably) late 1st century Jewish/Christian **The Ascension Of Isaiah**. In 9:13, as part of Isaiah's vision in the seventh heaven, he is told of the future descent of the Son through the layers of heaven, he "who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form, and they will think that he is flesh and a man." Here the clear implication is that he will not be. And who is "they"? Not the earthly authorities of Pilate and Herod, but "the god of that world," meaning Satan who, together with his evil angels, "will lay their hands upon him and hang him upon a tree, not knowing who he is." Compare Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that the "the rulers of this age" were unaware they were crucifying "the Lord of glory." Most liberal scholars acknowledge that "the rulers of this age" refers to the demon spirits, who were seen as inhabiting the lowest celestial sphere. Clearly, the "likeness" idea does not have a meaning of "identical" but of "similarity" (see also below), and this fits the concept of savior gods who descend toward the material levels of the universe and take on ever more material-like and human-like forms (though they do not physically enter matter itself). Such ideas about descending redeemers were a feature of Hellenistic mythology, and are found in such philosophers as Julian and Sallustius. On all these points, see Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?

We might also consider a very revealing passage in the Odes of Solomon. Ode 7 contains these verses:

*He [God] has generously shown himself to me in his simplicity,
because his kindness has diminished his grandeur.*

*He became like me that I might receive him.
In form [or essence, image] that I might put him on.*

Like my nature he became, that I might understand him.

The Odist does not introduce any historical Jesus figure here; it is God himself who undergoes this transformation. While there is no death or sacrifice involved, nor a heavenly descent, these ideas fit the concept of a deity revealing himself by 'taking on' a different form, one "like" that of humans so that the latter can better understand and relate to him. Here the image is simply poetic; God reveals himself through concepts which the human mind can grasp. In the Odes as a whole, that process is portrayed as taking place through revelatory emanations of God, styled—with strong Wisdom characteristics—as the Son, the Word, the Beloved. In Ode 11:11 the Odist says that he has put on God "like a garment." None of these images are identified with an historical Jesus. The "diminishing of his grandeur" of Ode 7 (above) implies that such a process is a compromising of God's ultimate and unknowable nature as pure spirit, in order to become knowable, and to this we can compare the more graphic idea of a heavenly descent such as is found in the descending redeemer context. (For a full analysis of this fascinating and revealing document, see Supplementary Article No. 4: The Odes of Solomon.)

For a closer consideration of the use of the term "flesh" see next item.

5. Romans 9:5 ("flesh" / "*kata sarka*")

From them [referring to the "people of Israel"] (are) the patriarchs, and from them the Christ according to the flesh (kata sarka), who is God overall, blessed forever [or, who is overall, God be blessed forever].

Before bringing in other examples of the use of the term "flesh," note the similarity here with Romans 1:3 (above, No. 1), in the use of the phrase "*kata sarka*" and its application to a concept of ethnic lineage, the former identified with David, the latter with the Jewish race.

It is first of all not unusual that a god be accorded an ethnic identity. The Hellenistic savior deity Osiris was identified as Egyptian. Gods such as Dionysos and Attis were given close associations with their peoples of origin, as were many others in ancient mythology. In the case of David, many biblical passages identified the expected Messiah as his descendent, and this could not be ignored even when the earliest faith was a belief only in a spiritual Son and Christ. Any savior figure, human or spiritual, growing out of the Jewish tradition, could probably not fail to be identified with that racial group. (See also Galatians 4:4, with its "born (coming into being) under the Law"—No. 11.)

In any case, the idea of a spiritual divinity who was a paradigm or champion for a group on earth, guaranteeing them rebirth and resurrection after death—in the pattern of 'likeness' which Paul describes in Romans 6:5—had to possess parallel characteristics. That is how the system of salvation in the cultic philosophy worked. Initiates entered into union with the god and underwent what he underwent; they shared in counterpart features and experiences. Moreover, Platonic philosophy declared that everything on earth was an imperfect copy of primary expressions in heaven. The upper world and its features were the "genuine" part of the universe; the material world was its mirror. All these factors could combine to produce features of the spiritual, mythical Christ in the minds of people like Paul which to our ears have a human and historical sounding character. They could create a picture of a mythical world which possessed earthly features and savior gods who acted within that world. And they could especially do so when they were also dependent on scriptural passages, such as we see in the case of Galatians 4:4's "born of woman" (see No. 11).

Now to the question of the term "flesh" as in the frequent stereotyped phrases, *en sarki*, *kata sarka*, etc. I have dealt with this at length in Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ As "Man" and in my Response to Pete in Reader Feedback 14. To summarize those ideas: just as it has been demonstrated that "blood" can be spoken of in a spiritual world context, and that the higher sphere contained heavenly counterparts to earthly features (particularly in a paradigmatic relationship with human believers), there should be no impediment to placing the concept of "flesh" as applied to Christ in the same setting, especially in view of the idea of descent on the part of savior gods to levels which were regarded as resembling the human and material. In fact, a commentator such as C. K. Barrett leans toward translating *kata sarka* as "in the sphere of the flesh." The demonic spirit powers who inhabited the air or "firmament" between the earth and the moon, the lowest celestial level, were regarded as belonging to the realm of flesh (see *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VII, p.128) and they were thought of as in some way corporeal, though they possessed 'heavenly' versions of earthly bodies (*op.cit.*, p.143). In certain contexts, the idea of *kata sarka* may entail the impact Christ has on the world of flesh and humans.

To quote in summary a paragraph from Reader Feedback 14: "Everywhere that an epistle writer uses a phrase about Jesus' nature or redeeming acts involving the word '*sarx*' we can suggest that he is speaking of that point or state of contact or similarity between the spiritual and the material.

In other words, the god has moved into the sphere or state of being which can react on the flesh, on humans and their salvation. Since philosophers like Julian speak very vividly of the graded higher world, whose spheres ever degrade as they descend toward, and start to affect, matter, and of gods moving down those spheres (compare the Ascension of Isaiah 9 and 10), we have a reasonable—if alien to our way of thinking— explanation for this pervasive manner of speaking among early Christian writers who never manage to place Jesus firmly on earth." Thus the terms most frequently used, *kata sarka* and *en sarki*, may use the word *sarx* to signify the world of humans (which includes the realm of the evil spirits who control it), but Christ is being described in that relationship he bears to the fleshly world of humans, in that spirit-matter dichotomy central to Platonic philosophy.

The other important locations in the epistles (beyond the three in Romans listed above) where the term "*sarx*" is used—and we can make a few further observations on them—are:

Ephesians 2:14-16:

For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. [RSV]

This is a highly mystical and even obscure passage. In 1:9-10, Ephesians has expressed a related idea: "For he [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth." Here Christ is a force or entity through which heaven and earth will be united. This reflects a concept of the period that heaven and earth were sundered, kept apart by the forces of evil in the lower heavens. Christ's death has served to restore that unity, to bring about the destruction of the evil forces that divide the universe. (Compare Colossians 2:15, and those passages noted above in 1 Corinthians 2:8 and the Ascension of Isaiah in which the identity of Christ is kept hidden from the demon spirits, so that they will proceed unwittingly with the sacrificial act which will ensure their destruction.)

Verses 2:14-16 convey the companion idea (and we will see it carried further in 2:17) that Christ will bring about a unification between a divided humanity, namely between Jew and gentile. The use of "in his flesh" (*en tei sarki autou*) in verse 14 conveys the idea of "in his person," within that context described earlier in which Christ enters the "sphere of flesh" in order to fulfill his redemptive purposes. "Creating in himself one new man in place of two" (verse 15) is reminiscent of Paul's earlier doctrine about the collective "body" formed by Christ and his believers—Christ the head, the church the limbs—another mystical idea which hardly has in mind a Christ in human form. This "new man," as well as the "one body" which unites Jew and gentile (verse 16) must be regarded as spiritual in nature, the expression once again of a highly mystical idea. We will look at other uses of the term "body" below (Colossians 1:22 and Hebrews 10:5).

Colossians 1:22:

(And you . . .) he [God] has now reconciled in his body of flesh (en toi somati tes sarkos autou) by his death [that of Christ], in order to present you holy and blameless before him . . .

One can sympathize with G. A. Wells' opinion that the concepts at the heart of the Pauline epistles are, for the most part, "unintelligible." Modern commentators either gloss over passages like this, failing to attempt any precise analysis of their meaning, or they try to twist and push

them into some semblance of relevance for the modern mind. One thing is clear: these ideas are quite alien to us, based on modes of thinking and views of reality that are, or should be, no longer meaningful or sustainable within today's rational, scientific universe. The writer of this epistle has just emerged from a christological hymn (1:15-20) which presents a cosmic picture of the Son almost unparalleled in the New Testament. He is the image of God, he has primacy over all created things. Through him everything in heaven and earth was created, including the great ranks of spiritual powers good and evil. He is pre-existent and the very universe is held together through him. As in Ephesians, it is through the Son that the sundered chaos of the universe is reconciled to God, creating "peace" and unity through a blood sacrifice; so too are sinners reconciled to God. Yet nowhere in these epistles is this boundless unifying and redemptive force placed on earth or identified with a given human man. To descend from this cosmic setting to the hill of Calvary simply on the basis of the lonely word "flesh" or "body," especially within such mystical contexts, is, rather than a leap of faith, a tumble into the naïve and absurd.

The writer (representing himself as Paul) goes on in verse 24 to contrast his own human nature with that of Christ, a passage which the NEB wisely translates this way: "This is my way of helping to complete, in my poor human flesh, the full tale of Christ's afflictions still to be endured, for the sake of his body which is the church." [NEB]

Here, the pseudo-Pauline writer makes a distinction between his "human" flesh and the "body" of Christ, which he defines as "the church," similar to the genuine Pauline concept pointed out earlier. This is a clear pointer to the two types of context for the word "flesh," a human and a spiritual one, to the mystical and mythological nature of all this language. Compare Ephesians 1:22-23, ". . . and gave him [Christ] as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Christ is portrayed once again as a cosmic force, filling the church, which comprises his "body."

1 Timothy 3:16:

He who was manifested in flesh / Vindicated in [or by] the Spirit / Beheld by angels / Was preached among the nations / Was believed in throughout the world / Taken up in glory. . . .

In "1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus" #104, I pointed out that this little hymn has no specific reference to a life on earth, no glimmer of the character of Jesus of Nazareth. He was preached, but not said to have preached. He was seen by angels, but not by humans.

The "*en sarki*" (in flesh) of the opening line may be understood as a revelation of the Son within the sphere of the flesh (that is, to humanity), or as a reference to his mythological operations within the lower, accessible portion of the universe through which gods came in contact with, and revealed themselves to, the material world.

Hebrews 2:14:

Since, then, the children [believers given to Christ by God] have flesh and blood, he [Christ] in like manner (paraplêsiôs) shared these things, so that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Again we encounter the principle of "likeness" and paradigmatic counterpart. In order to dissolve the power of Satan and death, Christ must conquer it through his own death. In order to undergo that death, he must 'take on' a nature which can experience it, a relation to flesh and blood. Most of the savior gods saved through their conquest of death; these had myths which described suffering and death in human-like terms. Yet no one regarded these experiences as historical, as

having taken place on earth, and certainly not recently. Such 'flesh and blood' existed in the realm of the mythical and spiritual, though in the lower part of that realm, since the higher levels of heaven, where God dwelled, were pure spirit.

The key word in this passage is *paraplêsiôs*, "in like manner." Does this word mean "identical"? No, it means "similar, resembling, near to." (This is fortunate for Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:27, for if his illness had been "identical" to death, Paul would be writing an obituary and not praising God for his colleague's recovery.) When we compare the emphasis in the Ascension of Isaiah 9 on the spirits only "thinking" that Christ "is flesh and a man" (see above No. 4), we can see a tendency to regard Christ as not fully partaking in a world and nature which is identical to the one humans share.

Hebrews 5:7:

In the days of his flesh [en tais hêmerais tês sarkos autou] he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears . . .

Has the writer of this epistle placed Jesus on earth in this passage? Or does this verse indicate yet another way of viewing the mythical Christ and learning of his activities? What in fact are the activities which this verse assigns to Jesus' "days in flesh"? Not earthly words or deeds, nor any Gospel-based piece of historical data. Rather, as scholars have pointed out (Ellingworth, Montefiore, Buchanan), the words refer to two passages in the Psalms. This is only one of several writers in the early Christian record who seem to regard Christ as one who 'lives' only in scripture-revealed myth.

For a discussion of why this passage does not fit the Gospel account of Gethsemane, see "Hebrews" #122, and Supplementary Article No. 9: A Sacrifice in Heaven: The Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

1 Peter 3:18:

He [Christ] was put to death in (the) flesh [sarki, a simple dative], made alive in/by (the) spirit [pneumati].

The ever-present dichotomy of early Christian soteriology: Christ dies *in flesh*, he rises *in spirit*. (Not, we might note, rising in a physical body on earth and appearing to his disciples). This is a capsule summary of the descending-ascending redeemer principle. The god must descend to a state where he can undergo suffering and death. He then ascends—"rises" or, in Jesus' case, is "led up" by God—to the highest divine level, reassuming his former pure spirit nature and his seat beside God's throne. He enters the realm/sphere of flesh (which includes that of the demon spirits), taking on lower forms and capacities, performs his act of salvation, then returns to the realm/sphere of spirit and God.

We may certainly ask why it is that these epistle writers, when speaking of the activities of Jesus, never give us an unmistakable reference to a life on earth. Why do they all choose to use such stilted, obscure language? Why is that language so consistent, so universal, using stereotyped terms? Clearly, these are philosophical concepts to fit mythical circumstances, and considering that they conform so well to the Middle Platonism of the era, we should have no trouble in deciding how to interpret them.

1 Peter 4:1:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in (the) flesh [sarki], arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. [NASB]

The other philosophical concept of the period, the basis of the mystery cult soteriology, was one of paradigmatic parallel, discussed above (compare Hebrews 2:14). The features and experiences of the savior god must mirror those of the devotee, and vice-versa in the matter of guaranteed salvation. We on earth have suffered in the flesh. The god too must suffer in the 'flesh' (the state he assumes when he descends toward the realm of matter). This need would eventually bring the savior, in the case of Christianity, onto the material earth and into a literal flesh (though some were to resist this trend and give rise to docetism). But in earliest Christianity, it could be fulfilled in the concept of the god's descent to a level of the universe where he could take on and undergo counterpart elements to human features and experiences. The above verse is a relationship of "likeness," similar to Paul's doctrine in Romans 6:5: "For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

2 Corinthians 5:16:

Proper translations of this verse (probably the most noted example of *kata sarka*) actually lift it out of the category of an arguable reference to an historical Jesus. "Just as from now on we know no man according to the flesh [*kata sarka*] so too, even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer." Compare the NEB translation: ". . .if (worldly standards) once counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer."

Among others, C. K. Barrett (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.170-1) recognizes that the second "according to the flesh" does not describe an attribute of Christ, but Paul's action of "knowing." And thus "the view, based on a false interpretation of this verse, that Paul had no interest in the Jesus of history, must be dismissed." It is the attitude of humans toward other humans, and toward Christ, which has been filtered through "the flesh"—their own. Thus Christ as an entirely spiritual figure remains unaffected.

6. Hebrews 10:5 ("body")

We have already seen several examples of Paul speaking of "heavenly bodies" and of Christ's "body" in a spiritual and mystical sense (1 Corinthians 15:40-49, Colossians 1:24, Ephesians 1:23 and 2:16). And the term "body" has been dealt with in a few cases in association with "flesh." But the most striking use of "*sôma*" comes in Hebrews 10:5, and it is most revealing:

*That is why, at his coming into the world, he says:
"Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire,
But thou hast prepared a body for me.
Whole-offerings and sin-offerings thou didst not delight in.
Then I said, 'Here am I: as it is written of me in the scroll,
I have come, O God, to do thy will.' " (Psalm 40:6-8 LXX) [NEB]*

Here the use of the term "body" is determined by scripture. But is the concept placed in an historical, earthly setting? Seemingly not. The quotation from the Psalm is regarded as the voice of Christ speaking, and it is synchronous with his "coming into the world." Paul Ellingworth

(*Hebrews*, p.499) calls the present tense used here a "timeless present." It certainly contains no association with a past moment of birth, at Bethlehem or anywhere else. All seems to take place in a scripture-revealed world of myth, unassociated with a given historical moment or incarnation.

See "Hebrews" #134 and Supplementary Article No. 9: A Sacrifice in Heaven.

Thus, all these terms, "blood," "flesh," "body," can be seen to inhabit a mythical setting, in conformity with contemporary philosophy and views of the universe, and with the system of paradigmatic soteriology as represented in the mystery cults. If, alongside these terms, we were to find other instances in the epistles where references are made to Jesus inhabiting an earthly life and circumstances, we might be led to interpret such terms in a material fashion. But in the absence of anything *but* these ambiguous references, and in the presence of many passages which exclude or deny a role for a human Jesus in the faith movement, the Platonic interpretation of such terms seems eminently acceptable.

7. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

3 *For I delivered to you, as of prime importance, what also I received:*
 that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,
4 *and that he was buried,*
 and that he has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures,
5 *and that he was seen (ôphthê) by Cephas, then by the twelve;*
6 *afterward he was seen by over 500 brothers at one time,*
 most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep;
7 *afterward he was seen by James, then by all the apostles;*
8 *last of all, as to one abnormally born, he was seen by me as well.*

The gospel of Paul and the appearances. Few other passages are pointed to so frequently to support the relationship of the epistles to the Gospels. But this assumption overlooks several anomalies.

What does the "received" of the opening line refer to? Almost universally it has been declared a reference to passed-on historical tradition, an oral gospel which Paul has gotten from others. But this would stand in direct contradiction with his adamant statement in Galatians 1:11-12: "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not the product of men. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but (I received it) through a revelation of [about] Jesus Christ."

In that Galatians passage, Paul demonstrates that the verb *paralambano* can be used for both reception of a tradition and reception of a revelation, and in fact the verb was used in the mysteries in regard to a revelation from a deity. We are led, then, to regard Paul's gospel as stated in 1 Corinthians 15 to be one which he has personally developed from revelation. He also tells us specifically where he derived this revealed information. In verses 3 and 4, he uses the phrase *kata tas graphas*, "according to the scriptures," and while this is traditionally interpreted as meaning 'in fulfillment of the scriptures,' it may also have the meaning of 'as we learn from the scriptures.'

Can the details of Paul's gospel fit a mythical setting? Savior gods regularly died; they were even occasionally buried, as in the case of Osiris. (The 'burial' doctrine may derive from one of the

elements in Paul's mystical view of baptism, that through this sacrament the believer was "buried" with Christ: see Romans 6:4. The rite determines the myth, a common process.) The rising from death is also an occasional feature of the mystery deities, but it may also be something Paul has derived from certain passages in the sacred writings, including that it occurred "on the third day" (as in Hosea 6:2).

An important corollary derives from the conclusion that Paul is speaking of a revealed gospel. He could hardly make such a claim if this information about Christ was circulating throughout the Christian world through oral tradition. Considering that he regularly speaks of Jesus' rising as a matter of faith (he even on occasion implies that the *death* is a matter of faith as well), we must conclude that no such historical traditions were in existence, and that these beliefs belong to the world of myth.

As for the list of "appearances" to people in Jerusalem, if the details of Paul's gospel are revealed myth, there is no necessary temporal connection between them and those "seeings" of the Christ. These men simply experienced some kind of revelation about him. Since Paul lists his own experience with the rest, with no suggestion that there is any difference in quality between his own and the others, we are entitled to conclude (as have some critical scholars, including those of the Jesus Seminar) that the latter are identical to Paul's, an experience which has always been accepted as entirely visionary, a revelation from the spiritual Son.

Finally, if the Gospels are regarded as the primary witness to the historical Jesus of Nazareth and his activities (and they must be, since he is to be found nowhere else in the early record), any document which fundamentally disagrees with that Gospel account should throw it into the deepest doubt. Paul's list of appearances shows glaring inconsistencies with the Gospel post-resurrection accounts, listing appearances which are not included in the Gospels (James and the 500) and completely ignoring the role and presence of the Gospel women.

This passage is dealt with at length in Supplementary Article No. 6: The Source of Paul's Gospel.

8. 1 Corinthians 7:10 / 9:14 ("words of the Lord")

Only once does a New Testament epistle writer offer pronouncements by Jesus which bear any resemblance to Gospel teachings. In answer to certain matters raised by the Corinthians, Paul twice mentions that he has a directive from "the Lord." Compared to the great ethical teachings recorded in the Gospels, these two little instructions are paltry. One (1 Corinthians 7:10) admonishes married couples not to divorce. The other (1 Corinthians 9:14) declares that apostles preaching the gospel should be paid for their trouble. When one considers how often Paul appeals to the scriptures for instruction and guidance, or how often he is engaged in crucial disputes but fails to draw on far more important teachings of Jesus to settle the matter, one can say that Paul has little or no sense of Jesus as a source of moral guidance. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9 he can even say that "you are taught *by God* to love one another"!

Where has Paul gotten these two directives in 1 Corinthians? We may once again turn to personal revelation. One of the hallmarks of the early prophetic movement was the practice of making pronouncements which the prophet claims he has received through direct personal revelation. Scholars call these "sayings of the risen Lord" and note that the early church made no distinction between such ongoing communications from heaven and the sayings of Jesus on earth. Of course, this is an unfounded rationalization, since the early record contains nothing

which can be identified as having been regarded as sayings of Jesus on earth, since no such attributions to an historical Jesus are ever made.

Paul's own language points to a heavenly source for his "words of the Lord." Consider what he says a few verses after his directive against divorce, in 1 Corinthians 7:25: "About virgins (i.e., celibacy) I do not have a command of the Lord, but I give my own opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."

The first-person phrasing indicates a general category of things Paul is accustomed to possessing for himself, not as part of a wide community knowledge or inheritance from tradition. In offering his own opinion, its value is based entirely on his sense of personal worth and reliability in the eyes of God.

9. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (the Lord's Supper)

This "Lord's Supper" scene is also included in scholars' catalogue of Paul's "words of the Lord" (as is the last of the group, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, an apocalyptic oracle about the coming of the Lord from heaven which has no parallel in the Gospels). Paul declares that he has received this information about Jesus' words at the Lord's Supper "from the Lord" (*apo tou kuriou*). While scholars have traditionally tied themselves in knots in order to see this as passed-on tradition from those who were at such a supposed event, the words plainly make it yet another case of personal revelation and Paul's own product. The verb he uses is *paralambano*, which we saw from Galatians 1:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 15:3 (above, No. 7) needs to be interpreted as reception through revelation.

A similar corollary also applies here. If Paul is describing words and a scene which he claims have come to him through a revelation from the Lord himself, this would rule out any circulating tradition about such an event throughout the Christian world, as Paul could hardly claim to know about it through personal inspiration. Indeed, as the present feature has pointed out, there seems to be a complete ignorance in the rest of the documentary record about any such Supper and any such establishment of a eucharistic sacrament (for example, in the Didache's thanksgiving meal of chapters 9 and 10, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews' discussion of the Mosaic covenant in 9:19-20—see "Top 20" #12).

As for the frequent translation of a phrase in the opening verse, "on the night he was arrested/betrayed," the latter renditions are dependent on Gospel preconceptions, whereas the word itself (*paradidomi*) has a basic meaning of "hand over" or "deliver up," which can equally apply in a mythical setting. Other passages in Paul (e.g., Romans 8:32) speak of God doing the delivering up, or even Jesus himself (Ephesians 5:2 and 25), which rules out, or renders unnecessary, a Gospel understanding. In regard to the setting at "night," there is nothing to prevent a mythical story from being set at night. If the Corinthian meal is observed after dark (Paul does not specify), the origin myth would likely be set at a corresponding time. Paul also links Christ's sacrifice with Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), a rite celebrated after sunset, though this link need only be symbolic and not identified with any specific historical Passover.

We are thus entitled to regard this "revealed" scene as a mythical development, possibly by Paul himself, and as such it falls into the same category as the sacred meal myths of all the other savior god cults of the time, many of which had meals which bore a strong resemblance to the Christian Eucharist.

10. Galatians 1:19 ("brother of the Lord")

But I did not see any of the other apostles, except James, the brother of the Lord. Paul uses the term "brother" a total of about 30 times, and the plural form "brothers" or "brethren" (as some translations render it) several more dozens of times. A minority are in the context of ethical teaching, Paul admonishing his audience about how to treat one's "brother." In most of these (if not all), the term means a fellow believer, not a blood sibling. In all of the other cases—leaving aside the passage under consideration here—the term clearly refers to a Christian believer, usually in the sense of one who is doing some kind of apostolic or congregational work (Timothy, Apollos, Sosthenes, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, etc.). In not a single instance can the term be identified as meaning "sibling."

It thus becomes a source of amazement to encounter those who claim that Galatians 1:19 is "obviously" a reference to James' sibling relationship to Jesus. When we compare the phrase with Philippians 1:14, "brothers/brethren in the Lord (*adelphôn en kuriô*)" which clearly refers to a brotherhood of believers, this is a strong indicator of what the almost identical phrase applied to James signifies. He, too, is a 'brother in/of the Lord.' The fact that Paul nowhere else applies this full phrase to other specific individuals is hardly a compelling argument against such an interpretation. James, as head of the Jerusalem brotherhood, may have been granted this designation as a special 'title.' We should also note that the phrase's formality seems out of place; if Paul were talking about a personal sibling relationship, "the brother of Jesus" might have been more apt, rather than "of the Lord."

The appearance of the phrase "the brothers of the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 9:5 can further refine the picture. While the term "brother" by itself in general parlance, to judge by Paul's use of it, seems to be applied to all manner of apostles and believers, the phrase "brothers in/of the Lord" may designate a certain sectarian group or organization, one located in Jerusalem. This is suggested by the mention of the "more than 500 brothers" listed among those who had a vision of the spiritual Christ (1 Cor. 15:6). They have been differentiated from Peter, James and "all the apostles," indicating that the latter may be a sub-group within the overall brotherhood. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 9:5, the "other apostles" and even Peter are differentiated from "the brothers of the Lord," which would suggest that the latter group are not simply 'believers' since such a term would surely include Peter and the apostles, as it would include Peter, James and the apostles separately listed in 1 Corinthians 15. Thus, "brothers in/of the Lord" seems to designate an organized body, even if it may have been one with a fluid membership. (These apparent anomalies in both 1 Corinthians passages should caution us against trying to make too fixed an interpretation based on Paul's words, or at least the words that have ended up in our extant copies.)

It has also been noted that the epistles ascribed to both James and Jude conspicuously lack any mention of either of these figures being brothers of Jesus. For a full discussion of these and other points in this question, see my Response to Sean in Reader Feedback 3.

I also consider it a distinct possibility that this phrase began as a marginal gloss which was later inserted into the text. While there is nothing to indicate one way or another, it is the sort of wording that a scribe might have placed in the margin to clarify which James Paul was referring to. Such a 'clarification' would have been needed during the second century, after "James, the son

of Zebedee" became known as one of the Gospel apostles of Jesus, and James the Just had come to be regarded as Jesus' brother. A distinction might have been felt necessary in order to avoid confusion on the part of the reader.

As a corollary, we also need to be cautious in relying too much on analyses that depend on the exact wording of our surviving text. Whole arguments in the case of "the brother of the Lord" have hinged on the word "the" or the preposition "of" as opposed to the "in" of Philippians 1:14. Considering that our earliest portion of Galatians in an extant manuscript comes from the third century, and in complete form only in the fourth, and that all sorts of scribal amendments were made, intentionally and unintentionally, to the New Testament texts, reliance on knowing the original wording of any passage is extremely unwise.

11. Galatians 4:4 (-7)

⁴*But when the term [of enslavement to the Law] was completed, God sent his own Son, born of (a) woman, born under the Law, to purchase freedom for the subjects of the law, ⁵in order that we might attain the status of sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying 'Father!' ⁷You are therefore no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's own act an heir."* [NEB]

First, let's look at the principal phrase, "God sent his own Son." As described above (No. 4), this can be taken in the sense of the present-day revelation of Christ by God to apostles like Paul. It is a verb also used in the Old Testament in connection with the sending of spiritual beings such as angels, or Wisdom as in the Wisdom of Solomon 9:10. The basic form of the verb is used to denote the sending of the Holy Spirit. And in verse 6 the same verb is used to say that "God has sent into our hearts the spirit of his Son." Both the sending in verse 4 and the sending in verse 6 seem to be taking place at the same time, namely in the Pauline present. This is the arrival of the spiritual Christ within the current phenomenon of divine revelation.

If Paul has the acts of an historical Jesus in mind when he speaks of freedom and attaining the status of sons (verse 5), why does he revert in verse 7 to calling such things the result of an act of God? In fact, in the Greek of verse 5, the subject of the verb "purchase freedom" (literally, redeem) remains God. In other words, Paul has introduced Jesus onto the present scene, but fails to let him do the redeeming while he is here. Paul continues his characteristic focus on God in subsequent verses.

The two qualifying phrases, "born of woman, born under the Law," are descriptive of the Son, but not necessarily tied to the present 'sending.' Edward D. Burton (*International Critical Commentary*, Galatians, p.216f) points out that the way the verb and participle tenses are used in the Greek, the birth and subjection to the Law are presented as simple facts, with no necessary temporal relation to the main verb "sent." In other words, the conditions of being "born of woman" and being "subject to the Law" —the latter is Burton's preferred translation—do not have to be seen as present occurrences. (Burton, it is true, does not himself advocate this conclusion.) Paul has simply enumerated two of the features of the spiritual Christ which are relevant to the discussion.

Burton also notes that the word usually translated as "born" (*genomenon*) is not the most unambiguous verb that could have been used for this idea; the passive of *gennaô*, to give birth, would have been more straightforward. Instead, Paul uses the verb *ginomai*, which has a broader meaning of "to become, to come into existence." (Paul also uses the broader *ginomai* in Romans

1:3, where he says that the Son "arose from David's seed.") "Out of woman," of course, implies birth, but the point is, the broader concept lends itself to the atmosphere of myth.

Moreover, Paul's "born of woman" is not only something that was said of certain mythical savior gods, like Dionysos, it is a detail he could well have based not on history, but on his source for all that he says about the Son: the scriptures. The famous passage in Isaiah 7:14, "A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son and call him Immanuel," was taken by Jew and early Christian alike to refer to the Messiah. Once again, a scriptural passage that could not be ignored was applied by early Christians to their heavenly Christ, in the sense of counterpart characteristics which he possessed in the higher world. National gods were often regarded as having the same lineage as the nation itself, which is one interpretation that could be given to Christ as "born" (or 'coming into being') under the Law.

Not surprisingly, Paul fails to give us the name of this woman, and she is notably missing only a few verses later (4:24-31) when he offers an elaborate allegory about mothers and sons in regard to the descendants of Abraham. One might ask why it is that Paul bothers to say that Christ was born of a woman, since this should be an obvious biological fact to his readers. His point may be that he wishes to stress the paradigmatic parallel between believers—who are themselves born of woman, as well as born under the law of the old covenant which Paul wants to abrogate—and Christ himself. Only through counterpart characteristics can paradigmatic effects exist. But such relationships by definition operate between higher and lower worlds, between the spiritual and the material. It follows, then, that Christ and his features must belong to the higher world, in order to be in appropriate counterpart to those of Paul's readers.

12. Ephesians 2:17

And coming, he (Christ) announced the good news, peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near, for through him we both alike have access in one spirit to the Father. As in Nos. 4 and 11, Christ's "coming" is in a spiritual sense, one sent and revealed by God, as the epistles constantly tell us using verbs of disclosure and revelation. If the writer of this letter had the ministry of Jesus in mind, why did he not give us some of the teachings ascribed to him in the Gospels? Rather, the thought follows on the mythological idea of verses 14 to 16, discussed above (in No. 5), that the heavenly Christ has through his death reunited, not only a divided universe but a divided mankind, namely Jew and gentile. The thought expressed here in verse 17, in fact, is drawn from scripture, from Isaiah 57:19 which speaks of an end-time reconciliation between peoples. Even the preliminary words about preaching good news are based on Isaiah 52:7. This is a Christ coming in the spirit and speaking to the world through the reinterpreted sacred writings, a common feature of early Christian expression. The final phrase of the verse identifies him as a spiritual channel to the Father.

13. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

¹⁴You [referring to the Christians of Thessalonica] have fared like the congregations in Judea, God's people in Christ Jesus. You have been treated by your countrymen as they are treated by the Jews, ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, the Jews who are heedless of God's will and enemies of their fellow-men, ¹⁶hindering us from speaking to the gentiles to lead them to salvation. All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all." [NEB]

Verses 15-16 of this passage are almost universally regarded among critical scholars as an interpolation. Their sentiment does not agree with attitudes expressed elsewhere by Paul toward his Jewish countrymen, and the final sentence contains a virtually unmistakable reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred after Paul's death. Their authenticity is also belied by Paul's silence elsewhere on any guilt of the Jews in the matter of Christ's death, such as in Romans 11, where such a reference would have been natural and expected.

The question of interpolation in this passage has been thoroughly addressed in Supplementary Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus? Some of the scholars who have declared this an interpolation are Birger Pearson, Burton Mack, Wayne Meeks, Helmut Koester, PHEME Perkins, S. G. F. Brandon, Paula Fredrikson (see there for details).

14. 1 Timothy 6:13 / (And 6:3)

1 Timothy 6:12-14 reads ("Paul" addressing "Timothy"):

¹²Run the great race of faith and take hold of eternal life. For to this you were called and you confessed your faith nobly before many witnesses. ¹³Now in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Jesus Christ, [who himself made the same noble confession and gave his testimony to it before Pontius Pilate,] ¹⁴I charge you to obey your orders irreproachably and without fault until our Lord Jesus Christ appears."

While few scholars have openly declared this passage [in square brackets] to be an interpolation, some have pointed out certain problems in seeing it as a good fit within its context. These have been outlined in the Appendix to Article No. 3: Who Crucified Jesus?

The possibility of interpolation is also supported by something suspicious which occurs a few verses earlier. This is in regard to a recurring phrase throughout the Pastoral epistles: "wholesome teaching." The one occurrence (6:3) in which any attribution to Jesus is attached has the look of a marginal gloss inserted into the text: "those of the Lord Jesus Christ." This is especially likely, since at its first appearance (1:10) such teaching is attributed to God. This question, too, is examined in Article No. 3, and in item #102 of the Sound of Silence.

The reference to Pilate in 6:13 may alternatively be seen as a reflection of a newly developing biography about an historical Jesus in the early part of the second century, since all three Pastoral epistles are regarded by critical scholars as not by Paul but as second century products. However, I regard the Pastorals as containing strong evidence that their writer(s) is still unaware of any historical Jesus, and thus would argue for the stronger likelihood of interpolation. (See "1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus" #102-114.)

15. Hebrews 7:14

For it is very evident (*prodêlon*) that our Lord is sprung (*anatetalken*) from Judah, a tribe to which Moses made no reference in speaking of priests. Nowhere in Hebrews is the author concerned with recounting historical facts. All is dependent on scripture and archetypal relationships between old and new (with many of the most natural and compelling of those relationships, in regard to comparison with the Gospels, completely missing). The author needs to present his heavenly Christ as a new High Priest, one who

supplants the old cultic sacrificial system. Although he makes no specific mention of David, he is drawing here on well-known scriptural references to the future Messiah as being of the house of Judah. The use of "*prodêlon*" (clear, manifest to the senses or to judgment) fits the sense of knowledge drawn from scripture, not a product of historical record. No question of genealogy, such as we find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, enters the picture.

The verb "*anatellein*", to spring (by birth), is also the language of scripture. It is used in several messianic passages, such as Zechariah 6:12 and Ezekiel 29:21 ("a horn shall spring forth"). To confirm Jesus' role as High Priest, the writer turns to nothing in history, he draws on no deed or saying from the story of Jesus' life, but delves instead (7:17) into the timeless pages of scripture: "Thou art a priest forever, in the succession of Melchizedek." This line from the all-important Psalm 110 he takes as God's word to Jesus.

We might also note that "is sprung from" is in the perfect tense in the Greek, not a past-tense aorist, such as we might have expected had the writer meant: "Jesus of Nazareth was sprung from Judah." Instead, he uses the perfect "has sprung" which fits the mythical outlook: such things have happened, but they are also eternal and timeless, just as scripture, the timeless word of God, continues to inform us of these spiritual events. Buchanan, in his Anchor Bible Commentary (*Hebrews*, p.253) admits that "the author may not have received the information from local tradition at all . . . (but) from his use of scripture." Scripture: God's 'window' onto the higher spiritual world and its counterparts to earthly things.

16. Hebrews 9:27-28

²⁷*And as it is the lot of men to die once, and after death comes judgment,* ²⁸*so Christ was offered once to bear the burden of men's sins, and will appear [literally, he will be seen, or will reveal himself] a second time [ek deuterou], sin done away, to bring salvation to those who are watching for him.*

Scholars claim that here at least—and they are willing to allow that it is only here in the entire corpus of New Testament epistles—a Christian writer clearly refers to the End-time coming of Jesus, the Parousia, as a *second* coming. But is there such a reference even here?

If the "*ek deuterou*" means a second time, the parallel with verse 27 is destroyed. Verse 27 is saying that "first men die, and after that (or 'next') they are judged." There is no sense here of a "second time" for anything; the writer is simply offering us a sequence of events: death, followed by judgment. Does this not imply that verse 28 is offering a sequence as well? "Christ was offered once, and after that (next) he will appear to bring salvation."

The idea of appearing "a second time" would be intrusive here. Since the writer is clearly presenting his readers with some kind of parallel between verses 27 and 28 (note also the "once" in both parts), it seems unlikely he would introduce an element which doesn't fit the parallel, especially one he doesn't need. "*Ek deuterou*" can have the alternate meaning of "secondly" or "next in sequence," like the similar word *deuteron*, which appears in this sense in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Just as men's death is followed by judgment, so is Christ's sacrifice followed by his appearance, but with no indication of how long a time between the two. Before the turn of the century, Vaughan (quoted in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol.4, p.340) translated verse 28 this way: "Christ died once and the next thing before him is the Advent." Thus even in Hebrews it would seem that we have no Second Coming of Christ.

17. Hebrews 12:2-3

²*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

³*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. [NIV]*

A seeming biographical element, reminiscent, if vaguely, of the Gospel story. Verse 2 is not a problem in itself. The reference to "the cross" can fit a mythical context, just as similar features in the myths of the savior gods do not spell an historical or earthly setting. We may compare the Ascension of Isaiah 9:13, in which the Son, descending through the layers of heaven, is "hung on a tree" by "the god of that world," meaning Satan; or Paul's similar reference to "the rulers of this age" (accepted by most critical scholars as meaning the demon spirits) as the crucifiers of "the Lord of glory." The context in these passages is the heavenly world, not earth. We should also note that the above passage in Hebrews provides a very clear example of how early Christian thought envisioned no sojourn on earth after the resurrection, but saw Christ as proceeding directly to heaven following his death—wherever and however that was. As soon as he has "endured the cross" he takes his seat by the heavenly throne of God.

The matter of verse 3 is a little trickier. The Greek is literally: "Consider the one who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself (*hupo tôn hamartôlôn eis heauton*) . . ." Is this a reference to the Sandhedrin and Pilate, or the Pharisees who oppose Jesus' ministry, or the accusers and mockers at Jesus crucifixion? Some would like to read such graphic images into it, but the writer is not so accommodating. His vague reference, in fact, lends itself to a different interpretation, one conforming to the dominant practice one finds throughout Hebrews, namely the derivation of all its comparisons and archetypes from scripture.

Here, more than one scholar has pointed out the similarity of language and thought to the episode in Numbers 16:38 (LXX). There, Core, Dathan and Abiron have rebelled against Moses and his claim to speak for the Lord, with the result that they all perish in the abyss that opens up beneath their feet. The Lord then directs Moses to sanctify the censers of "these sinners against their own souls" (*tôn hamartôlôn toutôn en tais psuchais autôn*). The point is, they are sinners 'against themselves.' When we turn to the Hebrews passage, we find a similar phrase, now in the form of "sinners against himself," the latter referring to Christ. But this final word shows variants between manuscripts. Does the parallel in Numbers indicate that the original reading was "sinners against themselves"? Hugh Montefiore (*Hebrews*, p.216) accepts such a reading. Does the meaning entail the idea that Jesus is enduring hostility *for* sinners in general, that is, for their sake, not that the sinners are the ones being hostile to him, as in the Gospel portrayal? (This is Jean Héring's translation, *Hebrews*, p.109.) Jesus 'enduring hostility' may encompass no more than the mythical concept that he suffered and died.

Alternatively, if Jesus is said to have endured hostility—or rebellion, if the thought is a conscious parallel to the use of the word in Numbers—on the part of sinners, meaning that he suffered in order to redeem rebellious sinners (whether sinners against himself or against themselves), the whole idea may have been introduced in order to make a comparison to the believers in what the writer now urges upon them. Verse 4 goes on to say: "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." Just as Jesus suffered on account of sin, this too is the experience of believers, though their sufferings have not gone as far as his. But they too should endure, just as Jesus did. The writer rounds out his little homily by offering words of encouragement. Where are they taken from? Not from any voice of Jesus on earth, but once more from scripture, in Proverbs 3:11-12, a reference to God disciplining his sons.

18. Hebrews 13:11-13

¹¹*Those animals whose blood is brought as a sin-offering by the high priest into the sanctuary have their bodies burnt outside the camp,* ¹²*and therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood.* ¹³*Let us then go to meet him outside the camp, bearing the stigma that he bore. [NEB]*

The progression of the writer's thought in this passage reveals the source of this piece of "information" about Jesus, and is yet another example, following on the previous item, of his thorough dependence on scripture for the picture he presents. The starting point is not an historical tradition concerning Jesus, it is the sacrificial rite of the cult of Sinai as recounted in the scriptures. The writer's assumption is that everything to do with his heavenly High Priest must mirror that primordial archetype, that Jesus' actions in the higher, spiritual world had to have paralleled it. His language directly reflects such thinking. The animals' bodies were burned outside the camp at Sinai, and "therefore" Jesus himself did the same, "outside the gate." (It's too bad he didn't refer to Jerusalem or mention the names Calvary or Golgotha. Then we could all go home.)

That the idea of "outside the gate" is essentially symbolic is also supported by the succeeding verse, which suggests that the author saw both Jesus and his own sect as rejected outsiders, living 'beyond the pale' with no permanent home.

This passage, along with an earlier one (7:1-3) which also demonstrates that the writer of Hebrews has no concept of Jesus ever having been in Jerusalem, is discussed at length in Supplementary Article No. 9: A Sacrifice in Heaven.

19. 1 Peter 1:10-12

¹⁰*As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry,* ¹¹*seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ (eis Christon) and the glories (doxas) to follow.* ¹²*It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look. [NASB]*

As I pointed out in "James and 1 & 2 Peter" #161, the writer of this epistle is pointing to the prophets and what they wrote, asking whether this was meant for the time of those prophets or for the time of the epistle's readers. According to the writer, those prophecies pointed to the Christian apostles of his own day and the message they now carry, inspired by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. This curious thought, which ignores any idea that the prophets had foretold Jesus himself and passes over anything he might have done on earth, is remarkably similar to the way Paul expresses himself in Romans 1:2-4 ("Romans" #21), where the "gospel of God announced beforehand in the prophets" foretold Paul's gospel and not the life of Jesus. The thought also ignores any role for Jesus in the recent past, either in regard to prophesying his own sufferings (which the Gospels have him frequently do) or in setting in motion the movement to which those inspired Christian apostles belong.

But what has the writer said in the previous verses? Standard translations, like the one above, inevitably cast things as though the prophets are foretelling Christ's sufferings and his subsequent glory. While this might be taken as applying to the "sufferings" of Christ in the higher world, in a

mythical setting, an alternative understanding of the passage has been given by a few commentators. Note the overall idea contained in verses 10 to 12. Verse 10 speaks of the 'grace of God that would come to you,' and verse 12 'the matter the prophets spoke of related not to themselves but to you.' The readers of the epistle are in sight in both these verses. Thus when we look at the intervening verse 11, which talks of the spirit of Christ in the prophets pointing to and foretelling sufferings and glories to follow, it might be asked: should not these sufferings and glories *also* refer to the readers? And in fact, the phrase "*eis Christon*" which modifies "sufferings" can be taken not as the sufferings of Christ, but the sufferings of the believers in their goal to reach Christ, or as resulting from their faith in Christ. Such a focus on the readers would be in parallel with the focus on the readers in both flanking verses. Also, the latter half of verse 12 says that the preachers who bring the gospel announce such things (the sufferings and glories foretold by the prophets), as though these things are distinct from the "gospel" they carry, whereas if the sufferings and exaltation of *Christ* were the meaning, this should be an actual *part* of the gospel.

Ernest Best (*1 Peter*, p.81-83) points out that the term "glories" (*doxas*, plural) is unusual in application to Christ's exaltation, where such a thing is usually in the singular, and thus there is additional reason here to consider that the idea is *not* applied to Christ, but to the readers. Best quotes Selwyn's reading of "*eis Christon*" in the sense of "the sufferings (of Christians) on the 'Christward road' and their own subsequent glory." The "*eis Christon*" of verse 11 is paralleled by the "*eis humas*" of verse 10, both then relating to the readers. The last point to make is the idea implied by the final part of verse 12: "These are things that angels long to see into." The angels may be denied an understanding of the mysteries of salvation, but they would hardly be unaware of the fact that Christ had suffered and been exalted, as foretold by the prophets. Thus all things considered, the idea that verse 11 refers to prophecies of the sufferings of *Christ* is not at all necessary or compelling.

20. 2 Peter 1:16-18

It was not on tales artfully spun that we relied when we told (gnoridzo) you of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming (parousia); we saw him with our own eyes [literally, we became eyewitnesses] in majesty, when at the hands of God the Father he was invested with honor and glory, and there came to him from the sublime Presence a voice which said: 'This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favor rests.' This voice from heaven we ourselves heard; when it came we were with him on the sacred mountain. [NEB]

Just as Paul has a single passage suggesting a scene found in the Gospels (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, the "Lord's Supper"), so does the remaining body of epistles have another passage reminiscent of a Gospel scene. Scholars inevitably regard 2 Peter 1:16-18 as reflecting the memory of the incident in Jesus' ministry (whatever it might have been) which ended up in the Synoptic Gospels as the so-called Transfiguration.

I have already devoted a lengthy discussion to this passage in "James and 1 & 2 Peter" #176, as it contains notable missing elements when compared to the Synoptic passage, and raises many questions and anomalies which lead one to suspect that the writer knows nothing of a Gospel incident but is recounting a tradition about an epiphany, a visionary experience attributed to the apostle Peter. (Both Peter and the incident itself now lay in a fairly distant past, since this epistle is usually dated early in the second century. However, the epistle as a whole indicates that its writer and community still possessed no concept that that early apostle of the Christ had been a follower of an historical Jesus on earth.)

Important elements of the Gospel scene are not included, the writer passes up a far more convincing incident to prove Jesus' power, namely his resurrection from the tomb, the language has features which do not suggest that this took place during an earthly ministry and in fact the account resembles that of Old Testament epiphanies: these are only some of the arguments covered in the above-mentioned item #176. This is to be taken with #177, on the succeeding verse 1:19, in which the writer declares that this incident is secondary to the promises in scripture, the paramount source of Christian hopes. This is a bizarre idea no one with any knowledge of Jesus' life on earth could possibly have expressed. (These 2 Peter passages also constitute the central feature of Supplementary Article No. 7: Transfigured on the Holy Mountain: The Beginnings of Christianity.

Addendum: Revelation

While Revelation is not an epistle, a few of its silences were included in the main part of the Sound of Silence, and I will note here that there are two passing references in the final document of the New Testament which have suggested elements of the Gospel picture. To deal with those I will reproduce the relevant portions of my Supplementary Article No. 11: Revelation: The Gospel According to the Prophet John.

In 11:1-13 the author incorporates what are probably two earlier Jewish oracles originally spoken during the tribulations of the Jewish War. The first relates to the Temple and the abandonment of its outer court to the invading gentile. In the second, two prophets shall prophesy in the Holy City and then be slain. . . .

"Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." (11:8, RSV translation)

Is John using these oracles literally, or only as a symbolic representation of the people of God being rejected and attacked by the godless world? As for verse 8's "great city," some commentators regard this as symbolic, and not a literal reference to Jerusalem. For example, John Sweet (*op.cit.*, p.187) suggests that it represents the social and political embodiment of rebellion against God; "its present location is Rome." P. E. Hughes (*Revelation*, p.127) takes it as denoting "the worldwide structure of unbelief and defiance against God." G. Kroedel (*Augsberg Commentary on Revelation*, p. 226), while regarding the city on one level as Jerusalem, sees it "not as a geographical location but a symbolic place," representing the immoral, idolatrous, oppressive world. It is, then, a symbol of the corruption personified by great cities in general, the godless world "where their Lord was crucified." This says no more than that the sacrifice of Christ was the responsibility of the forces of evil and those who reject the gospel, a mystical concept which may have had no more historical substance than this in the mind of the writer.

We might also note that the clause "where their Lord was crucified" could be taken as tied primarily to the "allegorically called Sodom and Egypt" (the Greek phrase is literally "spiritually called"), and would thus be a step removed from any literal material "city," even were the latter to be understood as Jerusalem.

O. S. Wintermute, in a study of the Apocalypse of Elijah, observes (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, p.748, note 'w') that the term "great city" is frequently a pejorative expression, and was most often applied to the metropolis of a detested enemy. Comparing Revelation, he admits that its author always uses the term to refer to Rome. (He insists, however, that the one exception is here in 11:8, "where it is used to describe the city in which the Lord was

crucified," a good example of the practice of denying the acknowledged evidence on the basis of preconception.)

As for the reference to the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" whose names are inscribed on the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (21:14), that this is a mystic number and not identified with any historical figures can be seen by the context: the heavenly Jerusalem possesses twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a city wall with twelve foundation stones; upon these stones are inscribed "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Such "apostles" could have been envisioned as being of the type of John himself, namely prophets of the spiritual Christ.) It was probably such symbolic thinking which created the tradition that Jesus had had twelve disciples during an earthly ministry.

Postscript

*(Including a response to J. P. Holding's rebuttal essay to *The Sound of Silence*)*

The kind of pervasive silence on the Gospel character and events found in the early Christian record would, in any other discipline or field of research, inevitably produce a self-evident conclusion. That a dozen different writers in over two dozen documents, representing Christian communities spread over half an empire and more than half a century, concerned with describing and defending their faith, ethics and practice, their christology and soteriology, engaged in disputes on a variety of issues that were critical to the success and survival of the movement, would nevertheless fail to mention—even by chance—a single element which would enable us to clearly identify the beginnings of their religion and the object of their worship with the man and events recounted in the Gospels, is a situation that allows for only one deduction: that early Christianity knows of no such man or events.

I have demonstrated that certain human-sounding features, of which there are a handful in the epistles, do not provide this identification. Mythical savior gods active in higher-world or primordial settings regularly possessed such features, and the principles of Platonic parallelism between the material and the spiritual realms readily explain such thinking. "Born of woman" and being "of David's stock" are, as well, ideas that are determined by scripture and do not, in any case, tie Paul's Christ to the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth, recently on earth. Paul's "Lord's Supper" words might have come close, but his declaration that he got this information "from the Lord" shows that it is derived from personal revelation, ruling out historical tradition; close parallels with the sacred meals of the mystery cults put this scene into the realm of myth. 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 betrays clear evidence of later interpolation in its allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the mention of Pilate in 1 Timothy 6:13 is also suspicious, though being in a letter written in the first half of the second century, it may reflect a dawning of historical awareness which the earlier record so lamentably lacks. By any standard, this paucity of historical data, especially in view of the many opportunities within the early record to make clear reference to the man and events which are supposed to lie at the genesis of the faith, belie and destroy the myth of Christian beginnings.

But I have made all these points before. My task is now to bring such conclusions home in a new Postscript to the Sound of Silence which summarizes a feature two years in the making (mostly due to an intervening book) and which, to my knowledge, may be the fullest and most effective analysis ever published of the silence on the Gospel Jesus in the early Christian record. How to do it? Fortunately, a solution is to hand, thanks to Mr. J. P. Holding (a pseudonym) who, understandably impatient with the slow pace of my aural investigation, recently addressed the unfinished feature with a short essay on his Tekton Ministries web site, entitled "The Argument from (Epistolary) Silence Delineated." In this, he attempted to slay the Silence Monster by reviewing and to some extent enlarging on an argument he had used in earlier rebuttal essays to my views. (See "Special Items" at the head of the Reader Feedback section, with link included.) But his latest effort succeeds no better than his earlier ones, and in fact provides a ready opportunity for me to summarize and bring home the principles embodied in the Sound of Silence and to demonstrate that no explanation is sufficient to account for the void on the Gospel story found in the earliest record of the Christian religion.

I will address, point by point, Holding's rebuttal of my 200 Missing References to the Gospel Jesus in the New Testament Epistles. Leaving aside his introductory paragraph and a few incidental remarks along the way, his text will appear in italics, interrupted by my own comments in response.

It is well to begin by reminding the reader of two things. First, no amount of "silence" is enough to disprove the existence of Jesus, or the non-historicity of ANY person. Second, the mere number of examples offered is meaningless. If all 200 are off the mark, then 200 times zero is still zero; and this is all the more likely because we are not really dealing with 200 arguments, but far less, since many of the cites use the same basic arguments - so that, rather than 200 objections, one might actually say that there are less than a dozen (to be generous). . . .

To address Mr. Holding's opening point, I have not sought to "disprove" the existence of Jesus, in the sense of offering a mathematical or scientifically unassailable conclusion. That would be unrealistic. Historical research is neither mathematics nor laboratory science. I am seeking to *persuade*, to commend to the reasonable, unprejudiced person not locked into rigid confessional interests, that the evidence of the early Christian record strongly indicates that there was no historical Jesus. To produce that 'conviction of probability' is all one can hope to achieve—indeed, it is all one *needs* to achieve. My web site and my book *The Jesus Puzzle* ask the questions: "Was There No Historical Jesus?" and "Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?" If the average, reasonably open-minded reader answers to both questions: "It certainly looks that way," I will have accomplished the task, and those like Mr. Holding, who would never allow any amount or quality of evidence to compromise their personal beliefs, will continue to sputter from the sidelines, with nothing to be done about it.

As for Holding's own brand of mathematics, it suffers from some logical deficiencies. First of all, he has hardly demonstrated that "all 200 are off the mark," since he has not troubled to address any of them individually, let alone all 200. His further proviso, that there are only a certain number of basic arguments (he allows a dozen) is also undemonstrated. Even if I were to agree in principle with this claim, he would need to itemize these basic arguments and refute each one of them. Even this, however, would overlook an additional factor that comes into play, and is an essential part of my overall position. One example of a silence might be dismissed by postulating that in this particular instance, on this particular occasion, it may be reasonable to suppose that the writer felt no compelling need to include a Gospel reference, even *if* such a reference might have been natural. But as these individual examples mount up, reaching a number like 200, this line of argument becomes untenable. It's a little like flipping a coin. One toss of a head is perfectly reasonable. If 200 tosses produce 200 heads, something is wrong and an explanation must be sought. Also, I would have no objection if all 200 Missing References could be reduced to twelve basic types, though this is probably a low-end exaggeration. Still, even twelve is a substantial number to work with, and the fact that these twelve would be furthermore distributed throughout 200 separate examples brings that additional factor into play to an extent which Holding has not even begun to acknowledge or address.

The other dimension which he has entirely failed to acknowledge, let alone address, collectively or individually, are the silences I have labeled 'positive'—namely, those descriptions of the faith movement and the object of its worship, in which the epistle writers cast things in terms which allow no role for an historical Jesus or even clearly exclude such a figure. Romans 16:25-6, Colossians 2:2 and 1:26, Ephesians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 5:5, Titus 1:3 are only some of the more blatant examples of such startling and exclusionary silences, yet Holding (or any other apologist I have debated, for that matter) offers no plausible interpretation of them.

The No Need Principle

One of my key arguments regarding the "silence" of the epistle writers was that they do not mention certain details of Jesus' life (such as his birthplace and hometown) because there was no need to do so. As I put it:

Where is the NEED for any reference to such trivial details? What compelling interest would there have been? Ignatius had the specter of docetism hanging over him, and thus a need to refer to historical detail; in what context does Doherty suppose these things ought to have been mentioned by our other writers? Why should Ignatius or anyone else have mentioned Joseph in light of his "non-role" in the conception of Jesus? (He barely makes a cameo appearance in the Gospels and is not mentioned at all in Acts!) All that we have is Doherty's own inferred opinion that these details ought to have been included - yet there is not a shred of hard evidence to support such assertions.

I find it hard to believe that someone as intelligent and widely read as Mr. Holding obviously is can really consider this 'counter-argument' to be effective—indeed, to be anything other than an embarrassment. Most of his present essay is devoted to this "No Need" position, and I will follow his lead.

Let's consider a basic list (in no particular order) of those things which Holding considers to be "trivial." (I assume, though he refers above specifically to Bethlehem and Nazareth, that the 'triviality' applies to all the other things on which the first century epistle writers are equally silent.)

Trivial items relating to Jesus: the fact that he underwent a trial. That he was crucified on Calvary. That there was a tomb outside Jerusalem where he was buried and from which he emerged alive. That he had lived recently. That he worked miracles. That he raised people like Lazarus from the dead. That he taught an innovative moral code. That he had chosen disciples and appointed apostles. That he made apocalyptic predictions.

Holding asks what contexts would have existed for the epistle writers to refer to such things, either by accident or by design. Well, the 200 Silences feature has been at pains to supply 200 contexts in which such references might be expected to appear—at least some of the time. If 200 coins are flipped, we expect at least the occasional tails. This has nothing to do with "hard evidence." It is a matter of common sense and the laws of nature, including human ones. The Christian movement supposedly arose in response to a man who had undergone and been responsible for all the trivial elements and more listed above. The epistle writers are talking about the object of their worship, the beginnings and ongoing state of their faith movement, its internal struggles and external threats, and much more. Can anyone envision how so many writers talking about so many things in so many different documents and situations could so consistently and universally avoid mentioning *something* about the Gospel story and its central character?

Doherty makes some attempt to answer this charge [of the "no hard evidence"], but what emerges is little more than a restatement of his original argument, thusly:

"Nor is it valid to rationalize that Paul and the other early writers did not need to mention a given point about Jesus because their readers were already familiar with it. Perhaps so, but do none of us, in our letters and conversations, ever insert things our listeners are familiar with? We might have little to say to each other if we didn't."

This argument is utterly misplaced. True, some of us do insert things in our letters that our listeners are "familiar" with, but there are usually reasons for doing so. Since Doherty is apparently very unclear on this concept, let's return to the most fundamental basics of writing and communication and ask WHY a certain thing is usually mentioned when we are writing . . .

Before looking at the particular analogy Mr. Holding goes on to offer in support of his "no need" stance, let me again state the obvious. Holding points to it himself, but turns a blind eye to its solid applicability within my own position, which he is claiming to refute. One of the main points of the exercise in my Sound of Silence feature is to demonstrate the "reasons for doing so." To offer just a few examples: If an epistle writer is arguing for the feasibility and reliability of the dead being raised, there is clearly reason—and compelling reason—to refer to the traditions about Jesus having raised the dead to life, or even to his Gospel promises that the dead will be raised, as proof that such a thing is possible and can be anticipated. Neither Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 nor the writer of 1 Clement (24, 26) calls upon such proofs. If the authority and reliability of rival apostles is in contention, there is surely good reason for one side or the other to make an appeal to personal appointment by Jesus himself or to apostles appointed by him (the concept of apostolic tradition)—or to call attention to the lack of such a thing—and for the other side to have to take this into account. If a writer is arguing in the face of contrary opinion that there is no such thing as an unclean food, there is very good reason—again, a compelling one—to refer to Jesus' own teaching on this matter, regardless of whether the reader might be expected to be familiar with it. In such debates as these, the writer would have the strongest natural inclination to make such an appeal to Jesus' own precedent and authority, regardless of whether his audience was familiar with it—again, *at least some of the time*. This is all only common sense, based on knowledge of human nature and practice.

Whether he realizes it or not, Holding's analogy works against him:

My wife was born in Granite City, Illinois -- a hardworking steel town across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. I have just told you this basic fact for the first time. Now that you know this, why would I need to ever tell you about it again? Here are some possible reasons:

1. You have forgotten, and it shows. Perhaps you didn't consider it important enough to remember. That's quite all right, but I won't know that you've forgotten unless you come up with some absurd comment like, "Hey, I was in your wife's hometown the other day. We went to see Disneyland." Now at that point I can guess that you seem to have forgotten that my wife's hometown was Granite City and not LA -- either that, or you have mistaken the St. Louis Arch for something that it isn't. Either way, your error gives me a reason to correct you and say, "No, it was Granite City she was born in. I told you that! What kind of drugs are you taking?" (We'll also include in this area the possibility that I have forgotten that I told you.)

2. You want to argue about it. For whatever reason, you think I'm lying. Or wrong. Or you just don't believe it. Or someone told you my wife was born in Kokomo, Indiana. Whatever the case, if there is some doubt about it, then I have reason to bring up the subject again.

3. A change in circumstances, an update, or a correction. OK -- let's suppose the unlikely event that my wife lied to me these past 15 years I've known her, as did her mother, and her family, and they even forged a birth certificate that I've seen that says "Granite City" on it. I find out she was actually born in Tacoma. So I may say to you, "I told you once my wife was born in Granite City. Well, she was actually born in Tacoma." Such an admission of course might follow upon an incident like #2 above, but it might also occur independently. (Similarly, if we once lived in Cheyenne, but moved to St. Paul, we might say, "We moved from Cheyenne to St. Paul." But more likely I'd just say, "We moved to St. Paul" and assume you knew it was from Cheyenne.)

Mr. Holding asks, "Why would I ever need to tell you about it again?" and goes on to offer some theoretical reasons, without realizing (apparently) that these reasons are exactly like some of those I appeal to in my own position. If Jesus had taught that all foods are clean and yet this was still an issue in the early Christian community, do we not have to assume that Paul's detractors

have "forgotten" that fact? If Jesus himself had pronounced on the question and everyone remembered it, why was there any dispute? Why would Paul's rivals "want to argue about it," which they clearly did? If they thought he was "lying" or "wrong," which they must have, then Paul need merely have pointed to Jesus' own teachings and that would have settled the issue. Case closed. Here would have been a compelling reason to refer to something which presumably all Christians should have known, even if from the look of it they apparently did not.

Let's review this point in more formal logical terms: Those debates in the Christian community did exist. Therefore, (a) Jesus did not pronounce on such things, in which case the Gospels are wrong; or (b) he did, but not everyone knew this, in which case we can conclude that there was a natural and compelling necessity to remind people of what he said. In that case, if the epistle writers consistently fail to do that reminding, we are led to conclude the strong likelihood that they know of no such teaching by Jesus.

Another factor I have referred to in the main feature needs to be repeated in this context. If Jesus had been a prominent teacher, pronouncing on all manner of behavioral concerns, and everyone knew this, there would have been a strong tendency where disputed issues were involved to place pronouncements on such issues in his mouth. (We see this in the Gospels at every turn.) The fact that the epistle writers never do this leads us to conclude the strong possibility that they know of no teaching Jesus.

"A change in circumstances." To judge by the extant record, the Christian movement was a sprawling, uncoordinated one covering half the empire in small communities. Why should anyone presume that everything to do with the Gospel story and the life and death details of Jesus of Nazareth would be known by every Christian soul in all these places, only a couple of decades after his passing? Why would we assume that the myriad oral traditions about Jesus' career had reached all these people in equal amounts? And in ways and through agents that every Christian apostle would regard as thorough and reliable? That would be a highly unrealistic expectation. If Paul is writing to groups recently converted to the Christ—whether by himself or by an apostle like Apollos—is it feasible to expect they would already know every detail about Jesus? Every teaching, every miracle, every prediction? Of course not. Why would writers and apostles like Paul not treat their correspondence as another natural and convenient way of relaying oral traditions about Jesus to their audiences and converts, to ensure that they would become familiar with them, especially in situations where it would be advantageous to refer to such things? Holding's analogy fails on just about every count.

He goes on to focus his analogy on the question of the "need" to mention Bethlehem, and perhaps he has indeed chosen an example of something for which there was never really a clear occasion in any piece of Christian writing outside the Gospels to mention Jesus' birth place. However, I include that element as part of a larger silence on *any* of the places of Jesus' life: birth, youth, ministry, death and resurrection. The place of Jesus' birth simply joins a long line of sites on which the early writers are totally silent: Bethlehem, Galilee and its towns and villages, Jerusalem itself in connection with Jesus, Calvary as the very hill of salvation, and the empty tomb nearby—none of which seem of the slightest interest to early Christians as holy places or sites of pilgrimage. There may have been "no need" to visit such locations, but does it make sense that no one would, that no one would betray any sign in their correspondence that such places existed?

Of course, Holding's argument, to have any validity, must apply equally to all the pieces of data about Jesus' life, not just his birthplace, and indeed he goes on to declare:

Similar arguments, adjusted for data type, could be made about every single instance of lacking information that Doherty proposes. He can repeat his arguments in different words and multiply examples until the end of time, but that will not alter one bit the fact that there was simply no NEED for any of these details to be mentioned...and unless he can explain why there was a need when we get to specific examples, his arguments remain a chimera.

I don't think I need to belabor the point that this is a vast overstatement, lacking logical foundation, and completely discredited by the 200 "specific examples" I have provided.

This applies not, however, to another type of data, quotations of or allusions to the words of Jesus -- which Doherty seems to mix together with the above data-type. In the very next sentence he writes:

"Moreover, such reasoning hardly applies in the context of argument. An argument is delivered more forcefully precisely by appealing to a point that does mean something to the reader or listener, something the audience is familiar with. Adding, for example, the simple phrase "as Jesus himself said" could not help but support many of the views these letter writers are urging, and there hardly seems any good reason, especially a blanket one, for why they would all consistently fail to do so."

I have already addressed this matter and Doherty provides absolutely no reply to it. If adding the superfluous words "as Jesus himself said" adds "support" to the views of the epistle writers, then why did they absolutely never offer an attribution for allusions from the OT, and only sometimes from direct quotes from the OT? Surely to have added words like, "as David said" (Israel's greatest king!) or "as Solomon said" (reputedly the wisest man ever to have lived!) would have added "support" to whatever point the epistle writers were making, or done "honor" to the person who said or wrote it! In fact Doherty has anachronistically assumed a 20th-century citation and authority structure upon a time and place where such did not exist. That authors like Josephus freely used material from other writers without regular citation, for example, strongly suggests that the authority was held not in the person that said the thing, but in the thing itself. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that most quotes were made from memory, so that citation was not an ingrained habit as it is in today's scholarly papers. But whatever the social reason, it is irrelevant: The data shows that allusions required no introductory formula, and that direct quotes required no name attached to make them authoritative. Unless Doherty can explain why there is a difference in the methods of citation, his argument here also remains a chimera.

Again, Mr. Holding appeals to rationalizations which do not stand up to closer scrutiny. The early writers, including those of the Gospels, are constantly making attribution for their allusions to scripture. They either call attention to the fact that they are from scripture, or use the formulaic phrase, "as it is written." Often they say such things as "according to the scriptures" or "as spoken by the prophets," etc. While they may not always name specific books or Old Testament figures (though they certainly do a few times), this still constitutes an attribution. It is precisely the appeal to venerable authority as embodied in the sacred writings which is missing in the quotation of teachings and predictions supposedly spoken by Jesus but lacking any identification as such.

Moreover, there is a significant difference in the case of Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth was supposedly the founder of the movement, he was supposedly the man for whom many believers surrendered their Jewish heritage, their sensibilities about monotheism, their prohibitions against associating humans and human images with God. This status for Jesus far outranks any need or desire to attribute an appeal in scripture to the specific figure of Isaiah or Solomon or David. On the other hand, Holding skims over the fact that Paul *does* appeal to the words of David, which he directly

identifies as such: in Romans 4:6 and 11:9; as does Hebrews in 4:7. Hebrews, like 1 Clement, also appeals to 'words' of Christ, showing that such writers are interested in Jesus' voice, but where do they derive that voice? Not from the teachings of Jesus on earth, but from scripture, from passages found in the sacred writings which are interpreted as the heavenly Son himself speaking.

As for Josephus—an historian who might have had a personal interest in not making it look like he is dependent for his information on all and sundry—he would hardly have regarded his sources with the same veneration as Christians should be expected to have held for Jesus. Holding's attempted comparison with 20th century scholarly publication practices is also strained and hardly pertinent. Jesus' sayings are presumably circulated through oral tradition precisely because they are his product, not because they have some independent worth which makes their source superfluous. At the very least, Jesus' own name attached to critical doctrines and practices would have *added* a whole other dimension of authority, making a consistent non-attribution to him incomprehensible. The early Christians are not engaged in some scholarly pursuit; they are preaching—and suffering for—the teachings and actions of a man whom they believe to be divine and the agent of salvation. Citation and the appeal to Jesus' own authority would have been natural and highly motivated. We would expect to encounter such appeals *at least some of the time*. And whether quotes were made from memory or not, no one would have lost sight of the figure they had come from.

Finally, Holding attempts a parallel between what the early Christian correspondence tells us about Jesus and what it tells us about Paul:

His next point also misses the mark:

"If we were to rely entirely on the early Christian correspondence, we would know virtually nothing about the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in the Gospels. We would not know where he was born or when. We would not even know the era he lived in. We would be ignorant of the names of his parents, where he grew up, where he preached. Or even that he preached. We would not be able to identify a single one of his ethical teachings, for although the epistles often make moral pronouncements very close to the ones Jesus speaks in the Gospels, no writer ever attributes them to him."

This is very interesting. Now let's offer this parallel:

If we were to rely entirely on the early Christian correspondence, we would know virtually nothing about the Paul of Tarsus portrayed in Acts. We would not know where he was born or who his teacher was. We would not even know the city he lived in. We would be ignorant of the names of his parents, where he grew up, where he preached other than the churches he writes to.

Now of course this is not entirely true about Paul: We do know many things about him from his letters. But there are many things that only Acts tells us. And if Paul had not had to defend himself from charges leveled against him (as he did in Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence), how much would we know about him? It is only Luke who tells us about Tarsus and Gamaliel, and about Paul's work as a tentmaker and identity as a Roman citizen. We don't even get the names of Paul's parents, although in Judaism the father/son relationship was extremely important! We see that Paul's details about his own life are brought out under the rubric of two of our three conditions above -- and where does this relate to Jesus? It has no application.

Well, the distinction should be obvious. Jesus was the object—presumably—of universal Christian worship. He was God come to earth. The deeds he did in his life, the teachings and apocalyptic predictions he gave, the miracles he performed in support of those teachings, the events of his redemptive crucifixion on Calvary and resurrection from a nearby tomb, were the basis of the entire faith movement—supposedly. To find no mention of all these things within virtually the whole body of early Christian writings outside the Gospels is vastly more significant than finding few biographical details about an apostle of that figure, Paul of Tarsus. In the latter case, truly, there was little or no need for Paul himself or anyone else to give us those things. They bore no relevance to what Paul was doing, or to the Christian movement as a whole. No one was preaching the human Paul as a divinity, no one looked to him as the source of some innovative ethics, no one was worshiping or starting a religious movement around him. Indeed, most other Christian writers of the period show no knowledge of Paul whatsoever, indicating that his work and influence was far more limited and piecemeal than Acts portrays. One reference we do find to Paul, in 1 Clement 5, illustrates that when a writer has an occasion to speak of the human apostle's life and actions as an example of a point he is making, we do get such a reference. This is in sharp contrast to the void on all mention of the earthly Jesus in situations where those early writers would have had natural and often compelling occasion to do the same.

The early writers had absolutely no reason to mention where Jesus was born or when, what era he lived in, the names of his parents, where he grew up, where he preached, that he performed miracles or had it out with the Jewish leadership, and so on. It is all superfluous data, out of context for all that the early writers write, unless one of the three constraints above comes into play -- and there is not a scrap of evidence that any of them did!

Absolutely no reason . . . superfluous data . . . out of context. Mr. Holding is clearly in a state of denial, one which has led him and many others to make the most untenable claims and rationalizations about the great void on the Gospel Jesus in the early Christian record. Listening to the Sound of Silence has more than amply demonstrated that both reason and context abound in the epistles and non-canonical documents of the first century, and that the only thing superfluous is the Gospel story itself, when attempts are made to impose it on the very different and self-sufficient world of earliest Christianity.

Responses To Critiques Of The Mythicist Case

One:

Bernard Muller

(with contributions from Richard Carrier)

Part One

Higher and Lower Worlds, Rulers of this Age, Descending Savior Myths, Kata Sarka

* * * * *

Preface

"What we have here is a failure of imagination."

This recent phrase from another context (the U.S. Senate's 9/11 hearings) sums up a key aspect of the opposition to the Jesus Myth case. There has been a lot of discussion lately in cyber circles about the lack of serious and professional rebuttal to the mythicist position. I think we can dismiss the common claim that this is due to the abysmal nature of the case to be made for the non-existence of an historical Jesus and the fact that all scholars and historians have studied the matter so thoroughly they can only conclude it is not worth the bother to rebut. An earlier website article (Challenging Doherty: Critiquing the Mythicist Case) demonstrated that if anything is "abysmal," it is the state of affairs within the ranks of mainstream New Testament scholarship, where there is a notable lack of proper understanding of the mythicist case and effective arguments to be brought against it.

And so, the challenge has been taken up by the non-professional scholar and informed 'amateur' on the Internet. There are many, apologists and liberals alike, who have become quite educated (meaning largely self-educated) in biblical research, collectively amassing an astonishing degree of sophisticated knowledge and proficiency in the field. I would cast aspersions in principle on none of it, and indeed count myself among the ranks. I enjoy the advantage of having published an influential book and having gotten in on the bottom floor (1996) with a groundbreaking website, but I have learned a lot from the Internet community over the years, and still do. It is impossible for one person to investigate and absorb all there is to know in this field, or to investigate all possible interpretations, and the presence of several discussion boards on the Internet where issues like the existence of Jesus are often minutely examined and argued, is invaluable.

Thus, challenges to The Jesus Puzzle—and support for it—have come largely from these ever-expanding circles. And because a comprehensive presentation of the counter-arguments to be drawn against those challenges will entail ideas that others have contributed or have enlarged upon in relation to my own, this series of responses will be, in some respects, a combined effort. That is, in the course of addressing the rebuttals to The Jesus Puzzle, I will bring in the comments of others, quoting and acknowledging those supporting sources. Since "corroboration" of my claims, interpretations and translations is regularly demanded, usually with the implication that I stand in some deluded isolation in regard to them, I am only too happy to offer such support and, in some cases, to allow others to make arguments for me.

As most are no doubt aware, there have been no books by mainstream critical scholars in the last half century devoted to examining or debunking the position that no historical Jesus existed, and

certainly not my own. However, several critiques of *The Jesus Puzzle* (book and website) have been posted on the Internet, not all of them by Christian apologists with confessional interests. One that has received a good deal of attention is that of Bernard Muller.

Bernard Muller

Bernard Muller is an amateur in the technical sense (as am I, though with a university background in ancient history and classical languages). He is not an apologist and has no confessional axe to grind, but his site offers an interpretation of the figure of Jesus which is purely historical. At the same time, he has undertaken an aggressive critique of my book, *The Jesus Puzzle*. His two-part critique is at:

http://www.geocities.com/b_d_muller/djp1.html and
http://www.geocities.com/b_d_muller/djp2.html

I wish the quality of this critique were more professional, both in style and content. In general, it is poorly written, though that may be due in part to English not being his first language. But that's no excuse for the sophomoric rhetoric and a disorganized method of argumentation. Nor does his lack of knowledge and proficiency in ancient philosophy and the Greek language justify the naively confident, often supercilious tone. My focus, however, will be on the strength and legitimacy of his arguments against *The Jesus Puzzle*. To go back to my opening quote, Muller's biggest problem is a "failure of imagination," in that what he himself cannot conceive must not be; so much of what he argues is from the position of personal incredulity.

About a year ago, Richard Carrier of Columbia University and the Internet Infidels (see my comments on his review of *The Jesus Puzzle* elsewhere on this site, and which I will be referring to occasionally here), at someone's request, circulated an e-mail to a few people in which he provided a lengthy commentary on Bernard Muller's critique of my book. I will be quoting extensively from that commentary as part of my response to Muller, and also commenting on certain aspects of it. I will also be quoting from a few posters on the Internet Infidels discussion board (Biblical Criticism and History section) who have contributed pertinent criticisms of Muller's critique.

After some complimentary remarks on what he *does* agree with in regard to *The Jesus Puzzle*, Muller focuses on the points he will challenge. I will be quoting most of his text, but I will mark hiatuses, and the odd insertion of my own will be in italics in square brackets. (Muller's text, with his color scheme preserved, will be indented, while quotes from Richard Carrier and others will be in red, also indented.)

Higher and Lower Worlds

*From my standpoint, there are many things I agree with Earl about early Christianity. Among them, heavenly "myths" (& others), imports from the Old Testament & Hellenism, the Platonic/Philoic [sic] influence, the progressive & dissimilar development of Christian beliefs and, above all, the non-existence of a **Historic** Jesus. [I'm not sure what this means.] On these items, 'the Jesus Puzzle' makes good points, more so against a Jesus starting single-handily either a religion, sect or movement through his own preaching or/and deeds. No wonder Christian scholars, from conservative to liberal, are reluctant to engage Doherty!*

However, I do not intend here to review the points of agreement, not even all the ones I oppose: that would be too much of a task. Rather, I will concentrate on the main items of divergence: the crucifixion in some lower "fleshy" heaven and the denial of an earthly Jesus. Therefore I will proceed towards debunking Earl's related arguments by revealing the lack of evidence behind his key hypotheses....

Let's go over this by looking primarily at chapter 10 (Who Crucified Jesus?), pages 95-108....

In chapter 3, there is a brief section where Doherty comments on the two worlds concept in the Platonic mind: the upper one (above the earth), domain of the spiritual and the invisible, and the lower one, mainly earthly, perishable and unperfected.

Actually, the Platonic heaven was very vaguely described by Plato, as an upper space inhabited by ethereal "universals", "forms"/ "ideas", representing "images" of earthly things, and by an "unknowable" creator god, the Demiurge.

Back in ch. 10, Doherty keeps broadening this concept and importing some more from mystery cults, claiming counterparts in heaven of anything earthly, including events. Then he theorizes more and more, combining his pagan "true sacred past" world of myths with Judeo/Christian ones, introducing a partition of the heavens and an upper world (above the earth and below God's heaven), the home of demon spirits: "In this upper world, too, Christ has been crucified at the hands of the demon spirits." Here, the fleshy would meet the spirits, the material coexists with the ethereal, and all of that with only traces of flimsy "evidence" for back up. He finally declares: "For example, Christ had to be "of David's stock" (Romans 1:3), for the spiritual Son was now equated with the Messiah, and the clear testimony in scripture that the Messiah would be a descendant of David could not be ignored or abandoned." (p.99)

That comes after three pages of convoluted rhetorical speculations leading to some mythical upper world, with nothing suggesting it was believed by anyone in the first three centuries.

This passage at the beginning of my Chapter 10 provides a broad background in ancient philosophy in regard to its views of the universe, particularly Platonism. When such a picture is presented on which scholarship is in general agreement, writers do not as a rule load it down with a lot of references, although I do provide a selection of these along the way, both in this passage and in the following material (not to mention in the Bibliography). Muller apparently regards these "three pages of convoluted rhetorical speculations" as pure fantasy, invented out of my own head. I will first let Richard Carrier comment:

...Muller is wrong to imply there is no evidence the "higher and lower worlds" view "was believed by anyone in the first three centuries." The evidence for that is solid. See my quotation of Plutarch on Osiris in my review of Doherty as just one little example...but it is found all over the place, *especially* in the first three centuries, as all scholars agree, and there is no reasonable doubt that Paul shared the view...

Muller makes two important mistakes here.

(1) Muller seems to think it significant that Plato only "vaguely" described the celestial-terrestrial dichotomy (e.g. Symposium 202e-203a, Timaeus 90, etc.). It apparently is unknown to him that this was a doctrine formally articulated by *Aristotle* (in the *De Caelo*, among extant works), after Plato (who clearly had the idea, but like everything else, never formalized it), which became a mainstay of *Middle* Platonism, the Platonism of the very first three centuries....[F]or a prime example of the Middle Platonic development of the idea, see the Pseudo-Platonic dialogue Axiochus (esp. 365e-366a), the De Mundo of (probably) Apuleius, the De Motu of Cleomedes, and others.

(2) Muller thus makes the mistake of thinking "the Platonic heaven" was "an upper space inhabited by ethereal 'universals'," etc. That isn't quite correct. First, Plato also envisioned physical intermediary deities that mediate between man and God (Symposium 202e-203a). But more importantly, it is the Middle Platonic view that Doherty is talking about....The Middle

Platonic heavens are a material, physical place, with actual entities that live there and move between them (cf. Paul's trip to the 3rd Heaven in 2 Cor. 12; and just about anything Origen has to say on the subject)....

That modern scholars take the layered universe of Middle Platonism as a given can be seen in many commentaries. John Dillon, in his *The Middle Platonists* (e.g., p.26) refers to several philosophers, from Xenocrates to Plutarch, as envisioning a division between the "superlunary and sublunary spheres" with different beings, forces and characteristics assigned to each—imperfect and evil ones associated with the latter, different grades of good and pure spiritual beings distributed up through the former. Many New Testament commentaries present the layered universe concept, those on Ephesians in particular. For example, C. L. Mitton (*Ephesians*, p.148), in discussing the reference to Christ ascending "above all the heavens" (4:10), defines the upper realm as a series of storeys one above the other, the abode of spiritual powers intermediate between man and God, with God's dwelling above them all. In Jewish piety, there were seven heavens, or eight depending on how one included God's own sphere; the whole idea was imprecise and variable, not unlike most ancient theories and myths.

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* deals with these concepts regularly, as in Vol. I, p.165 under "*aēr*": "According to the ancient conception of the earth, the sphere of the air reaches to the moon, where the ethereal region of the stars commences. The Greek made a distinction between the impure element of air and the purer ether, thus finding in the former a place of abode for imperfect spirits..." Under "*arxē*" (rulers, authorities, in a spiritual sense [and mostly if not all evil]): "Their abode is now the *epourania* (Eph. 3:10), which is obviously the lowest of the different heavenly spheres (cf. 2 C. 12:2) from which *skotos* [the darkness] comes into this world (Eph. 6:12). The powers of the air, i.e., of the lowest heavenly sphere, have, somewhat schematically, separated God and man until the coming of Christ... [Vol. I, p.483]." Aristotle's discussion of the universe's structure in *De Caelo*, as mentioned above by Carrier, is referred to in *TDNT* Vol. III, p.872, under "*kosmos*": "The cosmos is for him a spherical body at the heart of which, surrounded by the spheres of the world and heaven, is the spherical earth, which Aristotle regards as unmoved."

The latter entry in the *TDNT* also makes other significant comments relevant to our purposes. "The story of the *kosmos* concept...ended, like that of Greek philosophy generally, in Alexandria. Here both the term and the concept were adopted by Judaism and brought into the Greek Bible...Both these achievements of intellectual history are represented by Philo...a sign [of] how significant the Greek concept was and how concerned [Philo] was to harmonise Jewish biblical faith and Greek philosophy in the understanding of the world and its relationship to God [p.877]." And [p.887]: "There are no distinctive NT cosmological conceptions. The NT shares all its views on the structure and external form of the world with the systems of the contemporary world. Hence it is possible to explain the details of NT cosmology only with the help of our knowledge of these systems. If it is asked, then, what is the cosmological or scientific content of various NT passages, the principle is no longer valid that Holy Scripture is its own interpreter."

In other words, the philosophy underlying Christianity was a product of its time. It did not exist in some splendid isolation, dependent on some theologically pure and timeless basis—especially one that will conveniently harmonize with our own modern outlook and preferences. (See my opening comments in Chapter 18 of *The Jesus Puzzle*, p.175.) I only wish commentators and critics would keep that in mind when questioning the links between Christian doctrine and ritual, and other religious expressions of the Hellenistic age. As the *TDNT* writer on *kosmos* says [p.887, n.70], there is an "indissoluble connection between religious proclamation and cosmological theory," and while referring specifically to Mithraism, he notes that the principle is "instructive" in regard to Christianity. The essential point in regard to my own work which I

want to make here is this: in interpreting the concepts of early Christian theology, we risk missing the entire meaning if we don't take into account the cosmological ideas of the culture within which these writers moved, if we choose to reject any interpretation based on those concepts, simply because we don't like them or find them alien. Partly from ignorance of the subject, partly from standing at the very different cosmological vantage point of our modern era, Muller and others dismiss what to their minds seems outlandish. But this is what *The Jesus Puzzle* attempts to do, place early Christian thought, as expressed in the documents, within the cosmological setting of the period. The result is surprisingly fruitful, consistent, and anything but *ad hoc*. To claim that references such as "of David's seed" in Romans 1:3 or "born of woman" in Galatians 4:4 can only refer to human, earthly features, is to ignore that cosmological background which saturated turn-of-the-era thinking. It is truly "a failure of imagination."

The curious thing about Muller's dismissal of "some mythical upper world" is that he later goes on to discuss in great detail the Ascension of Isaiah, with its accounts of Christ descending through the various layers of the heavens and performing certain actions within them. This document is perhaps the best and most vivid example we have from that period of the very principle he is rejecting, and I will be addressing it later, in response to Muller's and Carrier's extensive discussion of it. And while he spends a few words on my Appendix 6 in *The Jesus Puzzle*, "The location of the myths of the Greek savior gods and of Christ" in which I argue for an upper world (rather than primordial past) interpretation of early Common Era mythology about the activities of savior figures found in several documents, he seems to have absorbed very little of it.

But to return to the essence of Muller's objection, his inability to conceive of certain features accorded to Christ by early Christians like Paul as referring to a non-earthly setting:

And the question remains: how could a descendant of David not be considered an earthly human? More so because Doherty admitted earlier Moses and Abraham (an ancestor of David!) were thought to have lived on earth. And according to the OT, David himself had many male descendants, the royal ones certainly described to be flesh & blood men. Why would the "Messiah" Jesus be different? In his epistles, did Paul explain a "Son of David" does not have to be born on earth? The answer is NO.

Muller's question "Why would the 'Messiah' Jesus be different?" is misdirected, because it is tied to his (and everyone else's) preconceptions. Priestly and scribal Judaism placed its myths (of the patriarchs, the Exodus, etc.) in supposed historical time, but Diaspora and Hellenistic Judaism, which is the milieu out of which Christianity arose, was far more attuned to Greek influence. One must first ask, what sort of "messiah" was envisioned by the earliest Christ cult, and once that is established (or theorized from the evidence), one then asks whether or how the features and passages under discussion might fit into such a picture. If spiritual beings populate the heavens, if "truer" primary forms of things in the material sphere are found in the spiritual one (the essence of Platonic philosophy), if figures and processes in the spirit world are the counterpart to those on earth, as in the relationship between the Righteous One in heaven and the righteous ones on earth in the Similitudes of Enoch (see especially chapter 51 and 53), then we have a basis on which to fit such features as "of David's stock" and "born of woman." (To which basis we can add the entire mythological ethos of the Hellenistic savior cults). I'll have more to say on this, but first, here is Carrier's reaction to Muller's comment:

I agree with Muller that "the question remains" how could a descendant of David not be considered an earthly human?"...I am sure Doherty has more ground than Muller thinks, since I know there are some vague cases of allegorical personages, and the concept makes sense from the ancient point of view. But I would like Doherty to produce some good examples (outside Christianity) of heavenly counterparts being allegorized as historical personages and as

descendants thereof. That would do a lot to move me more toward his camp. Hebrews establishes the conceptualization of heavenly parallels to earthly entities (like the Temple and High priest), but not quite to historical personages or at least lineages, and at any rate it would be nice to have evidence external to Christianity.

Carrier is right, it would be nice. And I'm sure that if neither he nor I can produce a parallel to this specific sort of case, it may well not exist. But he is overlooking one thing. The uniqueness of Romans 1:3 (which so many people tend to fixate about) is almost certainly dependent on something which is not operative in any other venue, namely a reading of the Jewish scriptures. I will not repeat here my many arguments in many places for seeing this statement by Paul as something he has derived from those scriptures, informing us in the preceding verse that this is part of the "gospel of God about his Son" as found in the prophets. Paul (or perhaps some liturgical source he is drawing on) has "read" scripture within that conceptualization milieu Carrier speaks of, something not restricted to Christian thought. In doing so, he may well have gone where no man did before, since, as Muller quotes from *TJP*, Christ had to be "of David's stock" (Romans 1:3), for the spiritual Son was now equated with the Messiah, and the clear testimony in scripture that the Messiah would be a descendant of David could not be ignored or abandoned." (p.99). I sincerely hope that no one, including Carrier, will reject *a priori* a possible new idea by a given writer simply because it had never been thought or expressed by anyone else before him. (The same principle applies to the idea of a crucified Messiah.) Once again, Muller's question "How could a descendant of David not be considered an earthly human?" is misdirected and governed by his own outlook's limitations. Rather, one needs to ask, Why and on what basis might Paul have applied such a concept to his heavenly Christ? If there is a feasible answer to that, one that fits into the cosmological and philosophical conceptions of the time, then we have no need, or right, to reject it out of hand.

Moreover, Carrier himself is probably asking the wrong question. I don't think we should see Paul as "allegorizing" his Christ as an historical personage or as a spiritual descendant of an earthly man, any more than Philo was allegorizing his Heavenly Man as an earthly man. The Heavenly Man had his own existence and integrity as a spiritual entity. I don't know the full nature or extent of Paul's Platonic ground, how integrated into his thinking were those philosophical and cosmological conceptions. I don't know to what extent he might have comprehended how his heavenly Christ could have borne a relationship to David, spiritual or material. He could certainly be guilty of some convoluted deduction, and it often depended on his own examinations of scripture, as in Galatians 3:16 where he interprets God's promise to Abraham's "seed" as meaning Christ himself. In any case, we have evidence throughout the New Testament and non-canonical early writings that scripture was the source of all manner of ideas about Christ, that Christ was regarded as speaking from scripture, that scripture opened a window onto a spiritual, revealed world. (Hebrews, Revelation, 1 Clement and Barnabas contain good examples of this.) The mistake the modern mind makes, in trying to conceptualize this view of Christ in the heavenly world, is to over-literalize, which makes it harder for our minds to accept. I often get comments from readers about the difficulty they have in visualizing, let's say, Christ breaking heavenly bread with heavenly disciples at a heavenly table (as in 1 Cor. 11:23-6), or there being a whole chain of spiritual begettings from a heavenly David to the heavenly Jesus as his descendant. But writers like Plutarch show us that we don't need to take things quite so literally, or to impute a necessary literal conception of such things to Paul. In fact, the very stereotypical nature of the phrase "*kata sarka*" would indicate that for the early epistle writers it was the 'relationship' to the material sphere which was of primary importance in understanding the actions of Christ and their location in the lower reaches of the celestial sphere which were associated with the fleshly world. Paul shows no need or interest in trying to spell out those activities in any kind of literal manner, and when the writer of Colossians speaks in 2:15 of Christ on his cross "discarding the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment, making a

public spectacle of them and leading them as captives in his triumphal procession," this is neither an earthly scene nor one intended to be taken literally even in the spiritual realm. When the writer of 1 Peter in 2:21-24 describes the example provided by the suffering Christ, he quotes no historical traditions but offers a selection of phrases from Isaiah 53. It is not necessary to think that he envisioned them as literal descriptions of the sacrifice Christ underwent, especially as they are meant to constitute directives for imitative behavior by his readers. 1 Clement, too, in chapter 16, recounts the tale of Christ's humility in suffering and death by quoting the whole of the same Suffering Servant song, but the author hardly regarded this as the equivalent of literal history. It was, in fact, an account by "the Holy Spirit" since it came out of scripture, and it was followed by an account by Christ himself in his own words in the form of passages from Psalm 22 (since they are phrased in the first person). None of these passages, openly scriptural, are ever equated with historical events as fulfillment of such 'prophecies' (they are never identified as such). Since scholarship does not rush to label these passages as intended literal descriptions by their writers, why do they think it necessary to do so in the case of Romans 1:3, which is equally clearly derived from scripture, if only because Paul so states it?

This is not the spot to rehash "*kata sarka*" though there will be occasion to do that later. But before going on to Muller's next section, I will comment on a general remark by Carrier in regard to Muller's understanding of the Platonic universe. He says: "However, it does seem Muller is confused about just what that view was...and if one sifts through his confusion, there is still a valid point [he] makes, with which I have always agreed: a lot of Doherty's evidence is compatible with both Doherty's thesis *and* certain forms of historicism, and that is why I remain agnostic." Carrier will enlarge on that subsequently, as will I, but here I will simply add a caution to this claim. Such compatibility cannot be presented in isolation; those forms of historicism must be compatible with *all* the evidence. I will try to show why Carrier's continued agnosticism is not as justified as he suggests.

Systems of Soteriology

Note: on pages 99-100, Doherty writes: "The absorption of the spiritual power generated by the Deity and his acts is accomplished through **A Pattern Of "Likeness."** Here is the way Paul puts it in Romans 6:5:

"For if we become united with him in the **Likeness Of His Death**, certainly we shall be also in **[{} The Likeness Of His {}]** resurrection." [NASB]

In other words, the spiritual force set up by the acts of the deity in the primordial past or higher reality impacts on the devotee in the present in the **Parallel Process**. Death creates a "death," resurrection creates a "resurrection.""

However the Greek does NOT have what shows between my brackets (so much for the "pattern"!).

Carrier (and Carrier's point here should have been clear even in the English translation):

That is irrelevant. As anyone competent in Greek will tell you, the fact that the noun "resurrection" is in the genitive case in the apodosis of a conditional *entails* the implied insertion of the *tō homoiōmati* from the protasis. In other words: the word *is* there. The sentence makes absolutely no grammatical sense (it becomes literal gibberish) unless *tō homoiōmati* goes with both nouns, and that was in fact standard Greek practice. Now, that does not mean Doherty's *interpretation* of this sentence is correct. But it does mean Muller is way off base to attempt this particular criticism. Indeed, it makes him look much more amateurish than Doherty. A Greek scholar would rightly conclude that Muller doesn't know what he is talking about. Though Muller concedes this in his introduction, that only means he is aware of the fact that he is out of his element.

Returning to Muller at the point left off above:

And Earl arbitrarily takes **Paul's Explained Imagery** (used by the apostle in order to make a point -- 6:12-14) as if it were mythical statements: the "parallel" death of Christians is not a true death, but their baptism, considered here by Paul as terminating a prior sinful life, as stated in the preceding verse:

Ro6:4 NASB "Therefore we have been **Buried** with Him **Through Baptism Into Death**, so that as Christ was raised from the dead ..., so we too might **Walk in Newness Of Life**."

And here the "resurrection" of Christians is not a "likeness" of the alleged one of Christ, but the passage into a new (but still earthly) life, right after the baptism/"death". This is also explained in the following verses 6:6-14, including:

Ro6:7 NASB "for he who has **Died** [been baptized] is freed from sin."

Ro6:10-11 NASB "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be **Dead To Sin, But Alive** to God in Christ Jesus."

Doherty is "interpreting" out of context (and using favorable -- but misleading -- translation) in order to back up his mythicist case, as he does often.

And we know now why Paul used "likeness" (once!) in Ro6:5!

First, Carrier:

On the other hand, I agree with Muller's analysis in this note regarding what Paul was talking about. The evidence is extensive from many letters that Paul often talks this way, allegorizing current realities in the language of future death and resurrection. This is actually very Orphic of him—or rather it is a clever way to syncretize Orphic and Jewish mysticism. The Orphics also regarded our current bodies as already dead, because of their being weighed down by sin (as did Philo), etc. But this does not knock down Doherty's argument in the way Muller thinks. Because this Orphic connection actually serves to connect what Muller is saying to what Doherty is saying. So it may well be that **both** Doherty and Muller are correct....In short, Paul is talking about abstract sociological realities in the here and now, while Doherty is saying those had exact heavenly parallels. Thus, what Doherty is saying can actually entail what Muller is saying, and therefore what Muller is saying doesn't actually rebut Doherty, though it does show that Doherty's isn't the only credible interpretation.

Well, to some extent, I'm going to have to disagree with both of them. Muller, first of all, has seized (as he so often does) on some individual word or phrase, derives some significance from it which he thinks undercuts or destroys my case, then runs with it without giving it any more careful consideration. The essential parts of the passage, from Romans 6:2-8 (adding verse 11 later), go like this, and I'll use the NASB translation:

"...How shall we who died [*apethanomen*, aorist (past)] to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized [*ebaptisthēmen*, aorist] into his death? Therefore we have been buried [*sunetaphēmen*, aorist] with him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk [aorist subjunctive] in newness of life. For if we have become [*gegonamen*, perfect (past)] united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be [*esometha*, future] also in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin....Now if we have died [*apethanomen*, aorist] with Christ, we believe that we shall also live [*sudzēsomen*, future] with him."

If Muller's analysis were correct, we should expect to find that all of the parallel images Paul is drawing would be expressed in a past tense. Those relating to death and burial are. Paul's thought is that believers who have undergone baptism have, in homologous fashion, also undergone a death and burial. This mystic parallelism is the basic way ancient sacramentalism functions (about which I will say more shortly), and is found throughout much of the relevant literature of the period. But if when referring to resurrection, Paul were merely speaking of an already-achieved symbolic effect, something in consequence of baptism, as Muller alleges, there would have been no reason not to phrase those references in the past tense as well; in fact, it is difficult to see why he would have phrased them in the future if that was the extent of his meaning. Now, he admittedly muddles things a bit by linking the raising of Christ with his idea (in v. 4) of walking in newness of life, which is related to the present. He repeats a similar idea in verse 11: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." But there is no impediment to seeing Paul's complex of parallels as entailing both present and future consequences. In fact, at the conclusion of the whole passage (6:22-23), things seem to fall into place: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end [outcome, result], eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here, the "sanctification" is immediate, with the future result being "eternal life," something Paul would hardly speak of as already having been achieved in the present lives of believers (and for other reasons I will outline presently).

That future element is unmistakable in verse 8, "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." That this is something that hasn't happened yet is indicated by the idea of "belief." Note that no thought of this necessity for belief is expressed in regard to the parallel "death" with Christ. That, and the burial, are stated as a given; they have already taken place. Here in verse 8, the believer must have faith that the "living" with Christ will take place—at some time in the future—and is no doubt a reference to resurrection. But we also need to go beyond this one passage and determine whether Muller's declaration of what Paul means in 6:5 squares with his general outlook on resurrection and the "when" of its location—in other words, to avoid "interpreting out of context," which is the very thing he has accused me of doing.

First, let me say that I don't know what Carrier is referring to by "evidence from many letters that Paul often talks this way, allegorizing current realities in the language of future death and resurrection." For one thing, Paul never speaks of the death of believers in association with Christ in any future sense. Certainly in the Romans 6 passage under discussion the "death" as a consequence of baptism is entirely a past development, even if it is a continuing state. It is something the initiate has undergone already. If Carrier has a different context in mind (I don't know offhand what it would be), it would be irrelevant to this discussion. I'm not sure in what way his "Paul is talking about abstract sociological realities in the here and now" (or quite what this means) differs from the "exact heavenly parallels" to these which he suggests I am talking about. As far as I can see, the death and resurrection of the believer is and will be, for Paul, a spiritual/mystical consequence of their linkage with Christ and his corresponding experiences. That the "death" is not literal but only symbolic, while the resurrection will be more literal, to a new existence in a spiritual body and kingdom, should not matter. Both are the benefits to be enjoyed by the baptized initiate and it makes sense to link them together.

But how does Paul express himself in general about the resurrection of believers, and is it compatible with Muller's claims? Let's bring in some scholarly commentary on the Romans passage to guide us (another "context" which Muller seems to have neglected to consult). Here is what C. K. Barrett has to say (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p.116), with my own comments in square brackets:

"Baptism implies such a total commitment to Christ that it carries with it this double union with him, in death and in resurrection. Of the second clause, Paul writes only 'We shall be of his resurrection also'. The whole framework of the preceding clause [as Carrier has pointed out] must be repeated: Through the likeness of his resurrection (the other aspect of baptism) we shall be joined with his resurrection; that is, we shall be raised with him. Paul breaks the parallelism by using the future. This might be a purely 'logical' future, as in the proposition: If A is true then B will follow. But this would not agree with the undoubtedly temporal future of v. 8 [and elsewhere]. In fact, *Paul is always cautious of expression which might suggest that the Christian has already reached his goal* [emphasis mine], and to say in so many words 'We have died with Christ and we have been raised with Christ' would be to invite if not actually to commit the error condemned in 2 Tim ii.18."

Paul W. Meyer, in *Harper's Bible Commentary*, is another who recognizes the future character of Paul's idea of resurrection (p.1147), as does C.E.B. Cranfield in the new International Critical Commentary (*Romans*, p.306).

That passage in 2 Timothy (2:18) is a condemnation of those "who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already." In fact, that seems to be the very position of Paul's rivals in Corinth to which he devotes so much attention in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians. In chapter 4, he openly condemns it through irony and sarcasm: "Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!" Elsewhere, Paul is unambiguous about his interpretation of the resurrection of believers: it is a future one. As in Philippians 3:10-11: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead"; and verse 21: "and from heaven we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body..." In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Christ is the first to be resurrected, then in Christ "all shall be made alive [in the sense of revivifying]"—but "each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, *then at his coming* those who belong to Christ." As Barrett notes, Paul is ever anxious not to convey that the resurrection has already happened. Muller is confusing the "new life" lived in Christ as a consequence of baptism with the future resurrection which is consequent on Jesus' own resurrection; the former is immediate (and never uses the term "resurrection" to describe itself), while the latter—though available to the believer because he has undergone baptism—only comes into effect in the future.

Lest we have lost sight of it through this somewhat lengthy rebuttal, the purpose in Muller's objection to my interpretation of Romans 6:5 was to eradicate any possible "mythical" significance in what Paul is saying. In conjunction with that, he wants to eliminate my concept of the mechanism by which the parallelism of resurrection is effected. I have called it a "pattern of likeness" which produces a guarantee of the parallel effect of one upon the other. (Muller is wrong in stating that Paul uses the term "likeness" only in 6:5; it reappears in 8:3, where he says that God sent his Son in the "likeness"—same Greek word—of sinful flesh: apparently this is a significant part of the concept, inserted in a context where it seems peculiar and unnecessary. The same applies to a further usage when Paul quotes the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 in which an as-yet unnamed deity descends in the "likeness" of humans to undergo death.) Incidentally, *The Translator's New Testament* seems alone in recognizing the element of "guarantee" in translating 15:20: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. This is the guarantee that those who have died will be raised also." And it enlarges upon that in the Notes: "Firstfruits were thus also a first instalment, carrying the promise of more to come."

Muller would have done well to research this idea first, before rejecting it out of hand (no doubt a case of "personal incredulity"). One of the books that played an important role in shaping my

thinking in these matters was John J. Collins' *The Apocalyptic Imagination*. There, the concept of parallel guarantee is laid out. Here he is discussing the Similitudes of Enoch, with its Son of Man figure in heaven who has a paradigmatic relationship with an 'elect' on earth. (It will also serve to enlarge on my earlier discussion about parallel entities between heaven and earth.) In this quotation from pages 149-150, I will pare down to the essence of the picture (emphases are mine):

"This close connection between the individual Son of Man and the community of the righteous has led some scholars to invoke the allegedly Hebrew conception of corporate personality....There is no room for doubt that the Similitudes present the "Son of Man" as an individual figure distinct from the community... As Sjöberg has remarked, *he is not a man, at least not in the usual sense of the word, but is rather a heavenly being*. A closer analogy is found with the patron deities of nations in Near Eastern mythology. These deities have a representative unity with their peoples, although they are definitely distinguished from them....We have argued above that the "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7 should be understood in this sense, as *the heavenly counterpart* of the faithful Jews. The Similitudes differ from Daniel insofar as the human community is not identified in national terms but as the "righteous" or the "chosen."....Yet the correspondence between "the Chosen One" and the community of the chosen is analogous to that between [the archangel] Michael and Israel or any other *mythological counterpart* of a group or nation.

"There is a parallelism of action, or "structural homologue" [a phrase attributed to G. Theissen] between the earthly and heavenly counterparts. In Daniel "the son of man stands parallel to the (people of the) saints (of the Most High). *His exaltation means their exaltation.*" [George Nickelsburg, in *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life*, p.77.] Similarly in 1 Enoch the manifestation of the "Son of Man" figure *entails the triumph of the righteous*....The hiddenness of the Son of Man corresponds to the sufferings of the righteous community and the hidden character of their destiny. The structural homologue between the Son of Man and the community is thus complete. Although he does not share their suffering, the pattern of hiddenness and revelation is common to both....

In short, *The Son of Man is not a personification of the righteous community, but is conceived, in mythological fashion, as its heavenly Doppelgänger [double]. Now it is characteristic of mythological thinking that such a Doppelgänger is conceived to be more real and permanent than its earthly counterpart and prior to it in the order of being.* (See M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 3-6.)"

While Collins does not use or call attention to the word "likeness" in this context, the meaning is patently there. Parallelism, when one element guarantees the other, cannot do other than function in a pattern of likeness, and the fact that Paul uses this very word in the context of a 'guarantee' in Romans 6:5 clearly illustrates this. What kind of principle lies behind this concept? As Collins points out in regard to the Similitudes, there is a parallel association between heavenly and earthly counterparts, the former (the Son of Man/The Righteous One/The Elect One—he is variously titled) bestowing exaltation on the earthly group linked with him; but he lacks the element of having suffered (as does the heavenly counterpart figure in Daniel and 4 Ezra). We need move only to Revelation to find that element added. There, the "Lamb" bears "the marks of slaughter upon him" (5:6). For that reason, he is worthy to break the seals on the scrolls (5:9), he is worthy to receive "all power and wealth, wisdom and might, honour and glory and praise" (5:12). And by that blood (sacrifice), he "purchased for God men of every tribe and language, people and nation....(who) shall reign upon the earth" (5:10). But that purchase was not universal, it is the exaltation of an elect. And there is no theory here of vicarious atonement. Rather, it is the raw parallelism that is operating between the Lamb and his elect. As he is exalted, those linked with him follow in his path.

That early concept of soteriology is embodied in the christological hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. There a divine being humbles himself, descends and takes on a "likeness" to humans (it is never stipulated that he actually became one, and no elements of an earthly career are offered), and undergoes death. Because of this (*dio*), he is exalted to heaven, given a name of power and receives obeisance from all in heaven and earth and the underworld. Suffering leads to, produces, exaltation. There is no hint of an atonement doctrine here, of a redeeming sacrifice. The implication that is present, however, is that this process is guaranteed for the believer, in parallel with the Jesus of the hymn. Otherwise, what would be the point for the community which fashioned this piece of liturgy?

The rationale behind this might seem curious. While the idea of unity with the god is shared with the mystery cults, and the dying and rising mytheme itself is widespread, is there a more specific reason why a sectarian group with a Jewish background or connection would envision a heavenly being achieving exaltation through the pathway of suffering and death? In the absence of an atonement dimension, why would that be necessary? What theological precedent would lie behind such a concept? It doesn't seem to parallel any conceptions of sacrifice; nothing is done as a scapegoat, or on behalf of, or because of past misconduct on anyone's part. Revelation 5:9 implies that the significant consequence of the Lamb's death was not expiation of sin, but the exaltation of certain people to the position of priests and rulers upon the earth. (The sole reference in 1:5 to the Lamb's blood "freeing us from our sins" is incidental, and may simply mark the necessity for forgiveness as a prerequisite for receiving the benefits of exaltation.) This, in fact, is the standard Jewish apocalyptic expectation of Israel's own exaltation. The implication is that the Lamb is a "paradigm" to Israel's destiny: We (the Jews) have suffered, even to the ultimate, in obedience to God (as the hymn's verse 8), but we are destined to be exalted to the highest position, with our enemies bowing their knee to us—just as the author of Daniel formulated it in his scene in heaven with the "one like a son of man" symbolizing the saints of Israel. In keeping with the ancient idea to see human events as having their counterpart in the world of the supernatural, a representative figure in the latter sphere had to have undergone this same destiny. He suffered and was exalted, just as the Jews have suffered and will be exalted. It was a simple matter for human need to create divine reality: as our heavenly champion has undergone this, we in turn are guaranteed to undergo it, in that pattern of likeness. The doorway to this privilege is a sacramental one, through baptism, though prior to Paulinism it would seem that the doorway could be entered only by an elect, which all sectarian groups consider themselves to be.

We might note another aspect to this picture. In those documents expressing Jewish apocalyptic, from Daniel, to 1 Enoch, to Revelation, one finds a reflection of the Jewish conviction: We have the only God, he must be intending great things for us, we have suffered and endured defeat and subjugation, ergo, this must be the avenue to the inevitable exaltation. As the sacrificed Paschal lamb was the avenue and guarantee of our deliverance from Egypt, so here (in Revelation) is the heavenly Lamb who has been slaughtered and emerged triumphant. In traditional Jewish thought, the Exodus was the great past paradigm for the future: in the same way will God deliver us. (No doubt the legend was created and perpetuated to fill this need: the wish-expectation required a past paradigm in order to guarantee the future parallel.) But this Exodus paradigm existed in a past that could be styled primordial, since while nominally historical it was essentially legendary (especially when we know now from archaeology and other research that it never happened). When full-blown apocalypticism came along, that primordial past was replaced by the heavenly realm: the new paradigm (the one like a son of man, the sacrificed Lamb) now existed in the upper world. Whether this was the direct effect of Platonism or simply a contiguous development reflecting current trends of thinking, it parallels the thinking of the mystery cults and the placement of their myths and savior figures.

Paul (perhaps the first?) has added the element of vicarious atonement. That he is the first to do so may be implied by the statement of his gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3. Once one realizes that he has received his gospel "from no man" but through revelation (Galatians 1:11-12), then his declaration that "Christ died for our sins" might be seen as his innovation, though there is always the possibility that he is claiming more than his due. He also declares that his gospel is supported by scripture, which probably means it was derived from it—"according to the scriptures" (which I have argued can entail such a meaning). Paul's soteriology thus contains a mix of elements; he has grafted a new skin onto an old body, producing problems for himself and headaches for modern interpreters and theologians. But at base it is still the "paradigmatic parallel" system based on unity with the savior god, the same principle that drives the Hellenistic mystery cults.

Myths of the Savior Gods

But I have left Mr. Muller cooling his heels a little too long. Let's return to his critique of *The Jesus Puzzle*. His next section I will deal with briefly: a lengthy quoting of myths from various mystery deities, Attis, Mithras and Osiris, which he claims are set on earth. Of course, he is right. Most of these gods go back far beyond the advent of Platonic views of the universe. Their myths were originally placed in a primordial, distant past, the "sacred past" of mythologists like Campbell and Eliade. Their terminology was earthly (caves, rivers, trees). Once the Platonic concept of higher and lower worlds took hold, with its idea of the primary, true counterparts of earthly things and processes being located in the spiritual realm there was a shift in thinking about those earlier myths. Unfortunately, we have very little writings to go on to indicate that shift, and those we do have are generally by philosophers; we can't be sure how the ordinary initiate to the cults came to understand their myths. But Plutarch (1st century CE) states the principle very clearly. Addressing his audience, Clea, in *Isis and Osiris* (ch.11/355B; Loeb edition, p.29), he cautions her: "You must not think that any of these tales actually happened in the manner in which they are related." They are allegories, and he goes on to so interpret them. Clear statements like this are not encountered (to my knowledge) again before the 4th century, and Muller makes much of my appeal to two 4th century writers, Sallustius and the emperor Julian, claiming that this is too late. But this ignores the fact that the evidence we do have indicates a continuous Middle to Neo-Platonic interpretation of these myths, from Plutarch to Julian. Since Plutarch is virtually contemporaneous with Paul (and Paul was certainly a sophisticated thinker, in tune with the ideas of his day), Muller's attempt to discredit an attribution to Paul of this type of interpretation of the Christ myth simply fails.

Here is what Carrier has to say:

This is another example of arguments going rather badly for Muller as a result of not having the requisite background experience in the relevant field....But if Muller knew what he was talking about, he would know that there were at least three schemes of explanation understood by intellectuals in antiquity: the literal, the poetic, and the metaphysical (this was explicitly stated by Varro, Philo, Vitruvius, etc.). For a sterling example, see Plutarch's discussion of the Osiris myth in *On Isis and Osiris*—the whole thing, not just the parts Muller wants to read. There Plutarch surveys all three ways of reading the Osiris myth (and indeed, several versions within each), one of which is of an actual historical king named Osiris who lived on earth. But another is the very heavenly being that Doherty is talking about. And Plutarch says this was the *true* story, kept from the ignorant masses and related to initiates and intellectuals. This latter same sentiment is repeated in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and other authors, so we know it was widespread. Thus, citing an example of a literal reading of a myth does nothing whatsoever to counter the claim that the same myth had a metaphysical reading that was believed to be more true. And that "truer" reading always involved the heavenly aspect of the myth.

Rulers of this Age

Next, Muller tackles 1 Corinthians 2:8, the reference by Paul to "the rulers of this age" who "crucified the Lord of Glory."

Doherty is making a center piece of 1Corinthians2:6-8, trying to demonstrate that for Paul "the rulers" are heavenly authorities. However his main argument comes from epistles ('Ephesians' & 'Colossians') not written by Paul but later by others, as stated by Earl himself (p.13). This would nullify his argumentation: pseudo-Pauline letters simply cannot be trusted to represent Paul's thoughts & beliefs. And Paul never specified "the rulers" ('archon') as heavenly powers, but once (Ro13:3) described them as "down to earth" authorities!

Here is my viewpoint on this matter. But first, let's look at the verse in question:

1Co2:8 NKJV "None of the **Rulers** ['archon'] of this age understood it [God's wisdom], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

In his epistles, Paul used the word "rulers" ('archon') in two other verses:

a) The "rulers" ('archon') are **Human Authorities** in 'Romans', and not even considered "bad":

Ro13:3-6 NKJV "For **Rulers** ['archon'] are not a terror to good works, but to evil....

b) 1Co2:6-7 NKJV "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the **Rulers** ['archon'] of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,"

Here, the rulers do not have God's wisdom (but only Paul & his Christians did!).

Furthermore, according to Paul, "this age" has only **One** godly entity, "the god of this age" (2Co4:4), likely Satan (Ro16:20) (Paul used "demons" ('daimonion') only for pagan gods (1Co10:20-21), not for evil angels, the later ones never acknowledged in his authentic epistles). Therefore Paul had probably human authorities in his mind, but it is likely he included also Satan, considering 2Co4:4 ("The god of this age has blinded the mind of the unbelievers ...").

I note also the emphasis of the verse is on an unspecified God's plan being at work. The larger context is about human wisdom versus God's one, and the role of the Spirit. The identity of these rulers is of no consequence for Paul's argument: no details were required.

The fact that a word can be used in more than one sense nullifies any claim that it must always have the same meaning. "Archons" could refer to earthly authorities and it could refer to "evil spirits" as in Matthew 9:34 and elsewhere in the Gospels. Ignatius uses a phrase identical to Paul's with "ruler" in the singular: "*tou arxontos tou aiōnos toutou*" (of the ruler of this age, referring to Satan: Ephesians 17:1, and elsewhere). Bauer's Lexicon notes: "Many would also class the *arxontes tou aiōnos toutou* 1 Cor 2:6-8 in this category."

Muller fails to take into account a dominant idea of this period. From *The Jesus Puzzle* (p.101): "The term *aiōn*, age (or sometimes in the plural "ages") was in a religious and apocalyptic context a reference to the present age of the world, in the sense of all recorded history. The next, or "coming" age was the one after the Day of the Lord, when God's kingdom would be established. One of the governing ideas of the period was that the world to the present point had been under the control of the evil angels and spirit powers, and that the coming of the new age would see their long awaited overthrow. (For a discussion of the present and future "ages" of the world, see *TDNT*, Vol.1, p.204-207.)

Muller tries to argue that because the plural "rulers" as supposedly applied to spiritual beings can be found only in 1 Cor. 2:6 and 8 in Paul, it cannot be so interpreted, as all the other clearly spiritual ruler references are in the singular, and they imply there is "only one godly entity, likely Satan." Carrier remarks that

Paul does not say "only" there, so Muller has not made his case. Paul certainly believed in a multitude of demons just as he did angels.

As for Muller's position that my main evidence comes from Ephesians and Colossians, and thus any appeal to Paul himself is nullified, this is a non-sequitur. As Carrier notes:

That isn't relevant—the fact that, e.g., Ephesians says "the prince of the powers of the air," proves that the term referred to demons among Christians of the 1st century. 1 Enoch also uses the phrase "principalities and powers" to refer to demons (61:10, 89:59-90:15). Thus, Doherty has ground to suggest that this may be what Paul, too, is doing.

If Ephesians (3:10 and 6:12) can speak of the rulers and authorities in the heavens in no uncertain terms, this certainly casts its shadow back over 1 Corinthians 2:8. The pseudo-Paulines are precisely that because they continue on in the spirit of Paul. Muller can hardly claim the likelihood that a generation later, those writing in Paul's name have completely changed the meaning of his terminology. That Paul believed in demons is clear from 1 Corinthians 10:19-21, and he even allows that they are referred to as "gods" and "lords" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). In Ephesians 2:2 there is a direct echo of the terminology of 1 Corinthians 2:8: "...you formerly walked according to the (ways of) this age of the world, and according to the ruler of the authority of the air..." In regard to that passage, Clinton E. Arnold (*Ephesians: Power and Magic*, p.133) notes:

"Here in Eph 2:2,3 the influence of the flesh is coordinated with the influence of the 'authority of the air,' viz. the devil as head of a troop of spiritual forces. They conduct their operation in the present age. 'Flesh' does not function in this passage as an explanation or definition of what the author means by 'the authority of the air' or 'spirit.' The author is here describing two different kinds of 'powers,' one internal with respect to man and the other external, but both intent on exerting their dominion over man in this present age."

Muller notes the use of the identical phrase "*archontōn tou aiōnos toutou*" two verses preceding 1 Corinthians 2:8, suggesting that here it implies earthly rulers. I suggest it is quite the opposite. Paul says that "we speak of...not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away." In light of that usage of the term "age" discussed earlier, and the idea of the "passing away" of those who rule it, namely the evil spirits, Paul's reference is much more likely to be to spiritual figures. (The idea of earthly rulers as a whole "passing away" is a poorer fit.) When combined with Ephesians 3:10, in which pseudo-Paul refers to the hidden wisdom of God being revealed to the "rulers and authorities in the heavens," we have an almost perfect pairing. The rulers of 2:6-8 have also been in ignorance, and both passages speak of this wisdom of God as having been hidden "from the ages," a term associated with the ruling evil spirits. There comes a point when, even if nothing has been 'proved' in a mathematical sense (a very unrealistic requirement), one can no longer deny probabilities. As I note in *The Jesus Puzzle* (n. 46), a good number of scholars consider "rulers of this age" to be a reference to spiritual powers; one of those scholars (Paul Ellingworth) is of the opinion that they are in the majority (*A Translator's Handbook for 1 Corinthians*, p.46).

"Kata Sarka"

Doherty goes back on theorizing. To supply some evidence, he calls on two **4th Century** writers, Sallustius and emperor Julian "the Apostate"; but they lived no less than three centuries after Paul!

And Earl keeps mentioning a peculiar modern translation of 'kata sarka', "in the sphere of the flesh" (normally rendered as "according to the flesh"), as if it was primary evidence for his fleshy upper world. Even for 'en sarki' ("in flesh") (1Timothy3:16), Doherty claims it "can be translated in the sphere of the flesh" (with the sphere being that material/spiritual lower heaven!). So now,

"... **God Has Been Manifested In Flesh** ..." (1Ti3:16 Darby) (see also 1Pe4:1) takes a whole new meaning!

But then, considering:

"... some who think of us as walking **According To Flesh** ['kata sarka': would Paul be accused to walk in some lower heavens? Is it a realistic proposition?]. For walking **In Flesh**, we [Paul & his helpers] do not war **According To Flesh** ['kata sarka': Doherty's demonic upper world? Hardly so considering the context!]. For the arms of our warfare [are] not fleshly, but powerful according to God to [the] overthrow of strongholds." (2Co10:3-4 Darby)

"... but [in] that I [Paul] **Now Live In Flesh**, I live by faith ..." (Gal2:20 Darby)

"not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother [Onesimus, the slave of Philemon], specially to me [Paul], and how much rather to thee, both **In** [the] **Flesh** and in [the] Lord?" (Phm1:16, Darby)

Etc. (Ro2:28,8:9; Gal6:12; Php1:22,3:3,4)

Does "In Flesh" ('En Sarki') Really Mean In Another World?

Once again, Muller makes the mistake of ignoring the principle that the same word or phrase can have more than one meaning and application, and of declaring that because it means one thing in one set of instances, it must mean it in all. He declares that "*kata sarka*" is "normally rendered" as "according to the flesh." True enough, but what does this mean? Translators tend to opt for that "normal" translation simply because in so many instances they don't know how to render it in a way that makes the meaning clearer. (When they do take a chance, they usually include the word "human" which is an arbitrary reading into the phrase of the concept of earthly incarnation.) Once again, Muller argues from a position of personal incredulity, as he cannot understand how this phrase can at times refer to the spiritual world, and particularly "in the sphere of the flesh." Carrier responds:

Doherty's [translation] is closer to the actual Greek. See my remarks in my review [of *The Jesus Puzzle*].

[From that review:] "The actual phrase used, *kata sarka*, is indeed odd if it is supposed to emphasize an earthly sojourn. The preposition *kata* with the accusative literally means "down" or "down to" and implies motion, usually over or through its object, hence it literally reads "down through flesh" or "down to flesh" or even "towards flesh." It very frequently, by extension, means "at" or "in the region of," and this is how Doherty reads it. It only takes on the sense "in accordance with" in reference to fitness or conformity (via using *kata* as "down to" a purpose rather than a place), and thus can also mean "by flesh," "for flesh," "concerning flesh," or "in conformity with flesh." I have only seen it mean "according to" when followed by a cited author (e.g., "according to Euripedes," i.e. "down through, or in the region of Euripedes"), so it is unconventional to translate it as most Bibles do (a point against the usual reading and in favor of Doherty's). Even the "usual reading" is barely intelligible in the orthodox sense, especially since on that theory we should expect *en sarki* instead...[A]ll the common meanings of *kata* with the accusative support Doherty's reading: Jesus descended to and took on the likeness of flesh. It does not entail that he walked the earth. It could allow that, but many other strange details noted by Doherty are used to argue otherwise. At any rate, he makes a pretty good case for his reading, based on far more than this."

In regard to my rendering "*en sarki*" also as "in the sphere of the flesh," Carrier remarks [returning to his commentary]:

He is right—it can be so translated—but then it could also be translated as Muller has in mind, too. What I think Muller is missing the point of is how truly bizarre the phrase *en sarki* is. If Paul wanted to say that Jesus became flesh, there were many more common ways to say this. I am not aware in fact of *en sarki* ever being used of a God's incarnation (usually it is *epiphaneia* or some

such). On the other hand, I think Doherty downplays too much the fact that "in the sphere of the flesh" can still mean a literal incarnation on earth, so again it is impossible to decide what Paul meant here, at least in isolation.

It is not so much a case of downplaying. My purpose is to illustrate how these elements of the text can be consistent with the mythicist case, by showing that phrases involving *sarx* can be so interpreted, and demonstrating the peculiarity of the use and standard interpretation of this terminology. Carrier to some extent is contradicting himself here, since he has admitted that the standard translation is extremely bizarre as a way of speaking of incarnation on earth, but then implies that it *can* so easily mean a literal incarnation on earth that it is impossible to decide between them. He can't have it both ways, and I suggest that his remarks on the use of *sarx* indicate that one can and should decide in favor of my alternative—again, not out of surety (which we may never achieve), but on balance of probability.

Further to Muller's doubts about *en sarki* referring to another world, Carrier goes on:

It always means in this world (everything below the orb of the moon), which can mean having a body in the *aer* or on earth. The context is the Aristotelian scheme: everything below the orb of the moon is both "in the sphere of the flesh" and, literally, made of flesh. And that obviously includes ordinary people like you and me—though also demons of the *aer* (Osiris being a clear example, per Plutarch). Thus, even on Doherty's understanding it is not entailed that Jesus was **not** literally here on earth. [*I don't argue that; only that the mythicist reading is a better fit.*] That is only **possible**—to argue that it **is** the case requires a broader thesis resting on a wider range of evidence, which to be fair Doherty does seek to provide. He does not rest his case on any isolated piece of "evidence" like this. Hence his theory must be evaluated as a totality, against the totality of evidence, not picked at item by item, out of the larger context.

I fully agree. And this would be an appropriate point to reiterate the situation on the "*kata sarka*" issue, and by that I am referring to that handful of phrases found throughout the epistles which opponents of the mythicist position always like to point to: references to Christ's "flesh" and "blood," his 'descent' from David or the patriarchs "according to the flesh," "born of woman" and a few others. Observe:

- (1) As a body, these references never link Christ with an historical time, place or earthly identity.
- (2) They are not present alongside other references which *do* provide such links or identification.
- (3) In many cases, they would be peculiar ways of referring to an earthly life or person.
- (4) This peculiar language and lack of clear historical references is a universal phenomenon, found throughout early Christian literature in many documents and many authors.
- (5) Such references not only **can** be interpreted in a mythical, spiritual world context, they are very consistent when so interpreted.

This situation points strongly in the direction of the mythicist position. It fits the overall paradigm and the evidence, and thus it is not *ad hoc* to interpret such phrases accordingly. The same cannot be said of the denial position, such as that of Muller. Once again, I have to maintain that on balance of probability, the two positions are not equidistant from the center.

There is another consideration in regard to this language which has not so far been examined. There is no doubt (as some acknowledge) that the "*kata sarka* / (*en*) *sarki*" phraseology (along with other usages of *sarx*, as in Colossians 1:22 and 24) is very peculiar if it is being used to describe Jesus' life on earth—and exclusively. How, then, was such a strange convention established and how did it become so pervasive? From Paul to pseudo-Paul to Hebrews to 1 Peter to the Johannine epistles to the Pastorals, they all use the same terms. One might understand a single writer adopting such words out of his own idiosyncrasy to refer to Jesus' life or human descent, but how would it get passed on and retained by so many? Would it not have

run up against resistance or simple lack of reception in the minds of those who would have preferred to be more direct, who would have had their own natural inclination to refer to Jesus' life in more clear and standard ways? Moreover, it is doubtful that the author of Hebrews enjoyed any influence from Pauline circles, and even the community of 1 Peter shows no direct dependence on Pauline thought. The Johannine writings betray their own isolation. What, then, were the channels of the spread of this dubious language? In the context of a movement based on an historical person, can we envision how the situation we find in these documents could have arisen? I cannot. What *does* make sense is that the movement developed in the context of belief in a mythological Christ according to the principles of Middle Platonism. A verbal convention would be needed, and could develop and spread throughout a diverse, amorphous movement, to refer to that dual activity, the two aspects of the relationship of the descending-ascending god to his environment. No adverse tendencies would mitigate against adopting such expressions.

We see it stated most plainly in 1 Peter 3:18: "He was put to death in the flesh (*sarki*) but made alive in the spirit (*pneumati*)."¹ I have translated that to refer to "in the sphere of the flesh" and "in the sphere of the spirit," in those two parts of the Platonic universe. A god could not be seen to suffer in his pure spirit form, or in the upper realms of pure spirit, and so had to descend to levels associated with flesh where he took on (the likeness of) fleshly forms and *could* suffer and die (the concept found in Plutarch and Julian, and the Ascension of Isaiah). That this passage in 1 Peter is akin to a formulaic expression is indicated by its very brevity and stereotypic language. Try to envision the writer of this epistle (even if he *isn't* the apostle Peter) having an entire tradition in his mind of Jesus on earth, with all that that entailed in terms of teachings and activities, crucifixion on Calvary and resurrection from a nearby tomb, and then referring to that death and rising so austere, devoid of all sense of historical circumstance. The circumstances he *does* refer to are purely mythological: Christ's visit (3:19) to the dead spirits (no mention of appearances to the living), and arriving at the right hand of God in heaven "after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to him" (3:22, compare Col. 2:15).

That formulaic "flesh/spirit" dichotomy appears throughout the epistles. In the hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16, the "mystery of our religion" has the descending/ascending savior (not "God" as Muller would have it) manifested (a revelation word) *en sarki*, then vindicated/justified (i.e., exalted out of suffering) *en pneumati*. Once again, as in 1 Peter, all the references to this figure are mythological. He was "seen by angels" (no mention of humans), "proclaimed among nations" (no proclaiming by himself), and "believed in by the world" (an object of faith, not historical experience). The more famous hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 has the same flesh/spirit dichotomy (though it doesn't use the terms themselves), descending to the realm of flesh and taking on its "likeness," then ascending to the realm of spirit (heaven) to be exalted. In Romans 1:3/4 "*kata sarka*" and "*kata pneuma*" are set beside each other, the content of both being demonstrably derived from scripture, the former from messianic prophecy, the latter from Psalm 2:7-8.

Was this particular language convention confined to Christianity? Carrier (and others) are always encouraging (or challenging) me to find parallel usages in non-Christian literature. I admit I have yet to do so, but should this be considered unusual, or even a problem? It might very well be confined to Christian writings, but remember that we have no comparable body of writing for other religions. Plutarch prefers the terms "soul" and "body" when speaking of the two aspects of Osiris: as in chapter 54 when he speaks of the legend "that the *soul* of Osiris is everlasting and imperishable, but that his *body* Typhon oftentimes dismembers and causes to disappear..." Here, *body* must be a spiritual one, for (as Carrier points out) the repeated death and dismemberment places such activity in the mythological realm. We can regard it as the equivalent of the epistles' *flesh*, and it demonstrates that the idea of a god's body/flesh could be conceived of as undergoing spiritual experiences, including death and rising, in spiritual settings. That same chapter (54) also discusses the dichotomy between the imperishable and permanent, superior to destruction and

change—where the soul of Osiris dwells—and the perceptible world of the corporeal, where things are subject to "disorder and disturbance," including the death of Osiris' "body"—which indicates that the world of the corporeal must encompass a spirit dimension. When we get to Julian (who also does not use "flesh" in the epistolary manner, unfortunately), the Attis myth is interpreted (165) as the god representing the imperishable cause in the higher realm descending to the sphere of matter ("beneath the region of the moon") where, by mingling with it, he produces creation and generation in the material realm. But that mingling is fatal to him, and through his castration and death, he reascends to rejoin Cybele, his consort, restoring himself (and his initiates) to imperishability. This is simply another form of the death and resurrection myth, and its kinship with the descending/ascending motifs of Christian writings is unmistakable. All this is thoroughly Platonic—and all of it is gibberish, in that it bears no relation to reality.

Whereupon, we return to Muller.

Descending Gods

Nowhere in this section (pages 103-105) Doherty proves a mythical theme existed during Paul's times about "descending gods". Actually, even if Earl claims "the concept of the "descending redeemer" **Seems** to have been a persuasive idea during the era", he has to admit next "**The Evidence For The Pre-Christian Period Is Patchy And Much Debated.**" And Doherty does not provide any example!

As a matter of fact, I did. On page 137, I mention the heavenly savior figure (referred to, by the way, as a "Man") known as the Illuminator, in the Apocalypse of Adam. In the passage 76-83, he performs "signs and wonders" for the benefit of the spirit powers and is given a gnostic myth involving birth from a virgin ("born of woman," one might say) while angelic powers warred around them, and dragons, birds, caves and mountains all put in an appearance in a clearly supernatural context. Similarly, the "Man" of the Apocryphon of John (20,1-8) is fashioned in heaven into a luminous "body" and is cast into matter, but even there, his activities are in a supernatural venue at the hands of the archons, and he seems to undergo death. This material is densely obscure, and certainly alien to the modern mind, but the motifs are there and have much in common with those of the epistles (which are in their own way saturated with alien obscurity, as any theologian has to admit). Some commentators on Gnosticism have concluded that this material is pre-Christian; most of them allow that it is at least *independent* of Christianity.

Certainly, there were many stories about the Greek gods descending/ascending, in different human forms, but it is from the top of high places, like mount Olympus, **To The Earth Below**. Earl appears to agree: "To undergo such things ["pain, blood, death"], **The God** had to **Come Down To Humanity's Territory**." However later, he theorizes this "humanity's territory" was thought to include the air between earth and moon. Really! Were human beings living there? Which ones settled in the air?

And do we have any example of an ancient god descending to the air only (not all the way down to earth or the underworld!), and experiencing pain, blood & death? As it is usually the case, Doherty does not provide the primary evidence to support his claim. Personally I know of none. Who does?

And on the theme of "descending/ascending god", if Jesus was earthly and also later believed to be a pre-existent and then resurrected heavenly Deity, of course we would have, as an implied consequence, descent and ascent!

Carrier has already addressed Muller's incredulity that the realm of human territory ("flesh") could encompass the lowest spirit level, the air below the moon. And Muller himself will go on

to discuss the Ascension of Isaiah in great detail, so he does know of an apparent example of an ancient god descending and experiencing pain, blood and death in a location not on earth. He also ignores my quotes from Julian about Attis descending only to the boundary between spirit and matter. Moreover, as Carrier goes on to say:

I agree Doherty needs to document his background better. But here Doherty is still correct and Muller is quite wrong. First of all, hardly anyone thought the gods literally lived on Olympus. Anyone familiar with the literature of the period will know that the gods were almost universally conceived as living in heaven or Hades and sometimes ascending/descending from there. Plutarch's account of Osiris is a clear case, and directly links to Plato's discussion of divine intermediaries in the Symposium. But there are many other texts that establish the same point. All bona fide scholars of ancient religion agree. There is no doubt that Jews and Pagans both had a place for a middle kind of deity who mediated between the celestial region and the terrestrial, between god and men. And many descend and reascend, not to Olympus, but, literally, to Heaven.

Besides Osiris, who does exactly that, Romulus is another unmistakable example—and one whose pageant of incarnation and ascension was publicly celebrated in Rome in the 1st centuries BC and AD, without any doubt (we have it from Livy, Ovid, Plutarch, etc.). He is a heavenly being who descends, incarnates on earth, establishes an empire, is killed by a conspiracy of leaders, resurrects, and ascends back to heaven. However, unlike Plutarch's "true" Osiris, this is a literal historical event and takes place on earth (as far as the sources say at any rate). Even so, I seriously doubt there really was a historical Romulus. And the true "Osiris" incarnates and dies in the *aer*, not on earth, so he cuts a perfect parallel for Doherty's thesis.

Still again, Muller is right in an important sense: Doherty's ideas in this case are as compatible with a historical Jesus as not (as we see from the different treatment of Romulus and Osiris by one and the same author: Plutarch). Hence I am agnostic. The fact is, the whole scheme Doherty describes is true, but could be mapped onto a real person. It didn't have to be, but it could. And that only means Doherty's thesis is possible—not certain.

On these remarks see my next comments below. Muller goes on:

After quoting Php2:6-11 "... Bearing the **Human Likeness**, revealed in **Human Shape**, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even **Death** ..." (NEB), Earl remarks that "this divinity took on a likeness to base, material form, but never does it say that he became an actual man, much less give him a life on earth."

But does not death indicate a mortal fleshy condition? Which ancient god would have met **Death** when in a physical (but not flesh & blood) human shape?

Carrier responds:

Yes. Again, Plutarch's "true" account of Osiris is an example: he becomes mortal flesh and dies in the *aer* "many times" (which obviously does not mean Osiris appears among men again and again). But, yes, again, the same language can also mean one became a man on earth, a la Romulus. Paul specifies neither. So we can't decide on that observation alone (hence Doherty brings out other converging arguments, e.g. curious silences, the diverging views of the apocrypha, etc.).

First of all, I cannot believe that after reading my book, Muller can still naively ask "does not death indicate a mortal fleshy condition?" He may not agree with my conclusions, but he can surely recognize the principle that gods *can* die in mythical settings which are not on earth in history. This was Paula Fredriksen's very uninformed reaction (see my "Challenging Doherty")

article), and shows that the "failure of imagination" is widespread and betrays a deep misunderstanding of ancient world myth, especially in the period of Middle Platonism.

Carrier is one who has that understanding, but he has set limits on his commitment which I think are unjustified. He is correct in saying above that my "scheme is true but could be mapped onto a real person." But that's only in theory, since his comparison of the dual treatment of Romulus and Osiris by Plutarch with the situation in the New Testament is lacking in one important aspect. A writer like Plutarch makes it clear (though not to Muller) what he is doing; he states the earth-based myth and explains its meaning in terms of the heavenly version. He lays out his dual approach. Neither Paul nor any other New Testament epistle writer does that, and it is conspicuous by its absence. That all these authors and hymn writers would express themselves in this peculiar, ambiguous way without any clarification for the reader, while at the same time never providing the *earthly* version of Jesus' life, is, I maintain, not feasible if they were really speaking of a recent man. Carrier, in noting that the same language can apply to both a world above the earth and to becoming an actual man on earth, says "Paul specifies neither." But in a very real sense, he is wrong. Paul does indeed specify. He (as well as others) specifies by portraying his object of worship in terms of a spiritual, transcendent figure, without equating it with an historical man; he believes *in* a Son of God, not that anyone *was* the Son of God. He and others describe this Son in terms of Logos and Wisdom philosophy; the "interpretation" of Jesus of Nazareth which scholars have insisted on reading into these descriptions is never hinted at. Paul and others state in no uncertain terms that their Christ is a "mystery," a secret long-hidden by God and revealed in the present time through scripture and the Holy Spirit. In describing the advent of this Son in their own time, the verbs are of revealing, making known, manifesting, not coming to earth and living a life. In describing the beginnings of their revelatory faith movement, the gospel and the calling, the teaching and appointment of apostles, are all by God; debates are never argued or settled in terms of what Jesus taught or did in his ministry. This revelation of Christ and the gospel, fulfilling the age-old promise of God, is often phrased in such a way as to leave no room for an intervening Jesus figure; he is *excluded* from the scene and the ongoing course of salvation history. And when he is spoken of as due to arrive at the imminent Parousia, there is no mention of him having been on earth previously, in recent history, in Paul's own lifetime.

This total picture, with the observations made above about that handful of human-sounding terminology centered on *kata sarka*, placed within the context of Middle Platonic mythicism, can spell only one thing. Nothing has been mapped onto a real person, certainly not one who had just lived and supposedly left his mark on the world, generating a new faith movement. Everything in that picture fits; nothing is *ad hoc*. The paradigm is whole. It spells, I maintain, the failure and invalidity of agnosticism on the question of Jesus' existence. If we can't make a choice based on balance of probability in a case like this, we will never commit ourselves to anything.

If I may switch metaphors in mid-stream, I will borrow a phrase from Gilbert Murray (*Five Stages of Greek Religion*). What we have here is "a failure of nerve."

* * * * *

Because of the length of this rebuttal and the material included in it, I am breaking up the article into three parts. Both Muller and Carrier spent a lot of time on the Ascension of Isaiah and Hebrews, and there is more to come about descending gods, Romans 1:3 and kata sarka, as well as "born of woman" and secondary topics like Josephus. I am posting this first part before the rest is completed, which will hopefully be soon. In the course of writing the next parts, I may make some minor changes to this one.

Part Two

The Ascension of Isaiah, The Epistle to the Hebrews

* * * * *

In Part Two of this response to Bernard Muller, I will continue with his critique at the point I left off in Part One. The material to be covered here will include a lengthy discussion of the Ascension of Isaiah, as well as the Epistle to the Hebrews. As in Part One, I am incorporating remarks by Richard Carrier, whose commentary on Muller's critique of *The Jesus Puzzle* was circulated about a year ago by e-mail.

Bernard Muller's critique of *The Jesus Puzzle* can be found, in two parts, at:
http://www.geocities.com/b_d_muller/djp1.html and
http://www.geocities.com/b_d_muller/djp2.html

Again, I will be quoting much of Muller's and Carrier's texts, but I will mark hiatuses, and the odd insertion of my own will be in italics in square brackets. (Muller's text, with color scheme preserved, will be indented, while quotes from Carrier will be in red, and also indented.)

The Ascension of Isaiah

Carrier's comments on Muller's treatment of The Ascension of Isaiah were extensive, and I have a fair amount to say on my own behalf. Carrier also quoted whole passages of the Ascension, which will serve as reproductions of the text, parts of which I will occasionally repeat. Muller begins:

*For Doherty, the main evidence about a descending Son/god is "in a Jewish/Christian piece of writing called the Ascension of Isaiah". He asserts "here we can find corroboration for this picture of a divine Son who descends **into the lower reaches of the heavens** to be crucified by the demon spirits."*

This text appears to be composite, originally Jewish parts recycled with Christian insertions & additions. Here is Doherty's own appraisal: "... the several surviving manuscripts differ considerably in wording, phrases and even whole sections. It has been subjected to much editing in a complicated and uncertain pattern of revision." But later Earl will "guess" which parts are reliable and early! (which happen to be the ones fitting his agenda!!!)

2.5.1 Dating Of 'The Ascension Of Isaiah':

It is normally dated 150-200 in its final (Christian) edition; that's some three to four generations after Paul's times, and well after the writing of gospels, and during the Gnostic era!

2.5.1.1. *This dating is somewhat justified by strong Docetist innuendoes in the Christian parts (except 3:13-4:22). Let's review them:*

a) 9:13 "... He has descended and been made in **your form** [Isaiah], and they will **think** that He is flesh and is a man."

b) 10:17 to 10:30: *the Son keeps changing his physical appearance in order not to be detected when he goes down through the lower heavens and below.*

c) *Mary gives birth without experiencing labour pain (11:14).*

d) 11:17 "And I saw: In Nazareth He sucked the breast as a babe and as is customary in order that He might not be recognized." *(Jesus does not require food: typical 2nd century*

Docetism) [Where in this verse does it say that Jesus did not require food? Isn't breast milk food?]

Note: the Christian interpolations look very much dependant on the gospels, more so Matthew's (and very likely Peter's, written in the 2nd century):

a) 3:13 "He should **Before The sabbath** be crucified"

b) 3:14: the sepulchre is watched.

c) 3:16: the sepulchre is open by angels "**On The Third Day**".

d) 11:2-5,15 "And they took Him, and went to Nazareth in Galilee."

f) 11:19-20 "... they delivered Him to the king, and **Crucified Him ... In Jerusalem** indeed I was **Him Being Crucified** on a tree" (in true Docetist fashion, Isaiah is substituted to Jesus on the cross! For Gnostic Basilides (120-140), it is Simon of Cyrene --Irenaeus, AH, I, 24, 4)

[This is absurd. The text does not say this, especially in the midst of an historicist insertion about a Jesus born and died on earth, with no docetic features. The verse in question is translated: "In Jerusalem, indeed, I saw how they crucified him on a tree..." Where Muller gets the idea—or the wording—that Isaiah himself is crucified as a substitute for Jesus is beyond comprehension. I am tempted to compare him with Don Quixote (or is it Connecticut Yankee?), who "dashes madly off in all directions."]

Muller makes a number of basic mistakes here. First, he treats all parts of the composite Ascension of Isaiah as if the document were a unity from the beginning. In fact, they began life as two separate pieces: chapters 1 to 5, known as The Martyrdom of Isaiah, and chapters 6 to 11, known as the Vision of Isaiah. And within the former, 3:13-4:22 is generally regarded as a Christian interpolation. Thus, arguments made in regard to the first portion of the Ascension cannot be applied to the second, and are quite immaterial.

Second, the dating of the document is far more complex than Muller lets on. Again, dating the final composite version (coming at the end of a long and complex history of redaction and additions, with multiple manuscript lines, etc.) to the latter part of the second century, even if it were accurate, is of no value in determining what any given passage might have meant to the original writer or earlier editors. Besides, such a dating is not universal. Michael Knibb, translator and commentator on the Ascension of Isaiah in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol.2, p.143-176) dates the Martyrdom around the end of the first century CE, while the Vision, its date being "more difficult to determine," he places in "the second century" [p.149-150]. The joining of the two parts may not have occurred, he suggests, until the third or even the fourth century.

Third, it is by no means necessary to interpret the passages and references Muller highlights as having a docetic significance. In fact, there is a notable lack of any attention to docetism in this entire document. If the descending Son in chapter 9 taking on a human "form" is docetic, then so is the pre-Pauline hymn in Philippians 2:6-11. Moreover, some of the 'forms' taken on by the Son as he passes through the levels of heaven are *angelic*, which hardly relates to docetism. The principle of a divine being taking on the 'forms' of the spheres he is traversing is an aspect of the descent mythology under discussion. It was a concept that existed quite independently of principles of docetism, and really has nothing to do with it. When the demons of the firmament who hang the Son on a tree "think that he is flesh and a man" (9:13) the issue is his *identity*, the Son disguising himself so that his true identity is not recognized, not the issue inherent in docetism, that Christ was of phantom flesh rather than genuine flesh, so that he did not really suffer or take on the weaknesses of matter.

Fourth, Muller fails to take into account that 11:2-22 is almost certainly a later interpolation, based on Gospel-like traditions—though at a primitive level. (Carrier concurs, and even Muller

at one point identifies the passage as an interpolation, so it's all very confusing.) I argue this in Appendix 4 of my book [p.308f], which Muller seems to ignore. (He may not agree with it, but he at least has to take it into account. To make the sort of snide remark—found throughout his critique—he does in accusing me of "guessing" about the reliability of various parts of the Ascension according to my own "agenda" is not only gratuitously insulting, it's unbecoming of anyone claiming to be a serious scholar.) Thus, pointing to Gospel features in those interpolations within both portions of the Ascension is irrelevant to the arguments I make in regard to other chapters of the Vision.

2.5.1.3. Here is a clear expression of the Trinity, which, outside pertaining to baptism(s), became documented only in the latter part of the second century:

8:18 "And there they [angels of the 6th heaven]: all named the primal Father and His Beloved, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all with one voice."

Let's note this "Beloved" one is later identified as "the Lord Christ, who will be called "Jesus" in the world" (9:5) (as in 10:7 "... my Lord Christ who will be called Jesus") and also "the Son" (8:25,9:14).

So every occurrence in Christian writings of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within hailing distance of each other is "a clear expression of the Trinity"? Also, I don't know what Muller's latter observation above is supposed to signify. As it is, and as I mention in *The Jesus Puzzle* [p.107], Knibb voices the opinion that it is possible all entries of the names Jesus and Christ in the Vision are later additions [*op.cit.* p.170, n.'g']. But even if this were not the case, I fail to see how Muller's "note" affects the issue.

2.5.1.4. In his vision, when in the 7th heaven, Isaiah sees "holy Abel", Adam and Seth (chapter 9). This is very much Gnostic, more so for Seth, a minor figure in the OT, but most important in second century Christian Gnosticism, as evidenced in the Apocryphon of John (120-180). Also in the aforementioned work are the "seven heavens", a belief shared by the many Gnostic followers of Valentinus (120-160). Furthermore, none of the named "righteous" alive in the highest heaven are Jews and the God there has no "Jewish" hints (Isaiah is not even presented to him!). He is like the universal God of the main Gnostics (Basilides, Valentinus, Marcion, etc.). And according to Irenaeus, the doctrine of the Gnostic Ophites & Sethians incorporated a descent through the seven heavens (to earth!) by Christ taking different forms along the way ('Against Heresies', I, XXX, 12).

There are exactly four figures named in two places of chapter 9 referring to "righteous in heaven": Adam, Abel, Enoch, Seth. In what way are these not "Jews" or of no interest to Jewish sectarian writers? The idea of seven heavens is not restricted to gnosticism. As for the treatment of God in the Ascension, it is not unlike the presentation of God in Jewish sectarian and apocalyptic writing generally, such as Daniel and 1 Enoch. The Ascension (10:7) even uses the term "Most High" for God, which is typical of those writings, as in Daniel 7. Sectarian circles, being on the fringes of 'mainstream' Judaism, might also have a certain general commonality of atmosphere with gnostic expressions, given the latter's Jewish component, although I think it dubious that the god of the gnostics is best characterized as a "universal God."

But do the Christian additions confirm that the Son gets crucified "into the lower reaches of the heavens", as Earl contends? Let's look at the evidence.

At this point, Muller launches through a disjointed and very confused survey of various passages (including the clearly Christian insertion in the Martyrdom, and the interpolation of chapter 11) to 'disprove' the Son's killing in the spiritual heavens. I will cut through all of this and let Carrier take over with his own survey of these parts of the document. His quotes from the Ascension of Isaiah are placed in italics. I should clarify for the reader who is unfamiliar with the Ascension

and has no handy copy, that chapters 7 to 9 cover Isaiah's ascent, led by his angel guide, through the spirit layers, from the firmament to the highest (7th) heaven. In the midst of what he sees in the latter, the angel predicts the descent of the Son to rescue the spirits of the righteous in Sheol, and within that prediction is a description of how in his descent he will be killed by Satan and his demons (I will be quoting these key verses later). Then in chapter 10, Isaiah witnesses the commissioning of this task, the Father speaking to the Son and directing him how to go about it. (This section is fully quoted by Carrier.) This is followed by Isaiah having a vision of the Son descending through the various heavenly layers; and then, after fulfilling his mission in Sheol, the Son reascending. Between these two parts is the interpolation of 11:2-22, placing the Son on earth. These latter parts will be discussed in some detail, with quotations from the relevant passages.

Neither Muller nor Doherty has a slam dunk case with the Ascension of Isaiah. I will explain in detail. On the one hand, Muller would do well to actually read it:

7.9. And we ascended to the firmament, I and he, and there I saw Sammael and his hosts, and there was great fighting therein and the angels of Satan were envying one another. 10. And as above so on the earth also; for the likeness of that which is in the firmament is here on the earth. ... 6.13. And the angel who was sent to make him see was not of this firmament, nor was he of the angels of glory of this world, but he had come from the seventh heaven. ... 7.13. And afterwards he caused me to ascend above the firmament, to heaven (i.e. the first heaven).

So Doherty is right: the "firmament" is the *aer*, the space between earth and heaven, and in the firmament there is a parallel for everything on earth (Isaiah ascends from earth to the firmament and sees Satan and his demons fighting there, and Isaiah is told everything on earth has its parallel in the firmament and there are angels of the firmament, etc., and angels are by definition intermediary deities, etc.). To be precise, other texts show that holy things actually have their higher parallels in the levels of heaven (e.g. the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem have their parallels in the 3rd heaven, as attested in the Talmud and various Christian texts, while the Throne and Tabernacle of the Temple has its parallel in the 7th heaven—being the most holy thing on earth naturally its parallel has the highest and thus purest place in the cosmos).

This is well known to scholars of Jewish Second-Temple theology. Genesis 1:6-9 says "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven..."

Thus, the "firmament" is what divides the waters below (the sea) from the waters above (the higher levels of heaven). So when Isaiah ascends to the firmament, there can be no doubt this is where he is going, and that Doherty's point about parallels between things on earth and in the heavens is explicitly stated here (and is pretty evident from Hebrews as well).

Then:

10:7. And I heard the voice of the Most High, the Father of my Lord, saying to my Lord Christ who will be called Jesus: 8. "Go forth and descend through all the heavens, and thou wilt descend to the firmament and that world: to the angel in Sheol thou wilt descend, but to Haguel [Knibb: "perdition/destruction" - probably intended here as the name of the final place of punishment for the wicked] thou wilt not go."

So again Doherty is right: Jesus was to descend to the *firmament*, then Sheol, *not* earth. Earth is never mentioned here (the phrase [that world] refers to Sheol, or at most the whole sphere below the moon, not earth specifically—see below). One might say that "technically" Jesus had to pass earth to get to Sheol, but that does not mean he stopped on earth, and it is certainly not said here that he did or was even supposed to; he is told to go to the firmament and then Sheol. Period. Inanna descends from heaven to the underworld, skipping earth right by. She is incarnated in hell, killed, crucified, raised from the dead (in hell) with the water and food of life after three days, then ascends back to heaven, again skipping earth. This is pretty standard stuff in ancient cosmology and theology.

It continues:

10.9. *"And thou wilt become like unto the likeness of all who are in the five heavens. 10. And thou wilt be careful to become like the form of the angels of the firmament. 11. And none of the angels of that world shall know that Thou art with Me of the seven heavens and of their angels. 12. And they shall not know that Thou art with Me, till with a loud voice I have called the heavens, and their angels and their lights, unto the sixth heaven, in order that you mayest judge and destroy the princes and angels and gods of that world, and the world that is dominated by them: 13. For they have denied Me and said: 'We alone are and there is none beside us.' 14. And afterwards from the angels of death Thou wilt ascend to Thy place. And Thou wilt not be transformed in each heaven, but in glory wilt Thou ascend and sit on My right hand. 15. And thereupon the princes and powers of that world will worship Thee." 16. These commands I heard the Great Glory giving to my Lord.*

This is unmistakable: Jesus only arrives in disguise among the demons of the firmament, and they are the "princes" he will judge and destroy and who deny God, and from *there* Jesus ascends. The text goes on to describe how Jesus follows his orders and then descends through each level of heaven in turn, transforming himself at each lower stage to take the relevant form there (vv.10.17-28). This is where Doherty gets his thesis, and he is right—about what this text is saying, at any rate. Whether this text was a development upon an original creed that had once been mapped onto a real man, or whether this represents the original creed which was then euhemerized into a real man, is another issue altogether, and one I have not yet seen resolved. As far as I can see, all are viable interpretations of all the evidence we have. [*Here, of course, Carrier and I do not entirely agree.*]

Then, finally:

10.29. *And again He descended into the firmament where dwelleth the ruler of this world, and He gave the password to those on the left, and His form was like theirs, and they did not praise Him there; but they were envying one another and fighting: for here there is a power of evil and envying about trifles. 30. And I saw when He descended and made Himself like unto the angels of the air, and He was like one of them. 31. And He gave no password; for one was plundering and doing violence to another.*

Remember: Isaiah saw this fighting earlier, and was told it had parallels on earth. And he explicitly calls the firmament the *aer*, and says that is where Jesus ended up (here he says, point blank, he is like angels of the *aer*—not like men on earth.) Now, the following section is widely recognized to be a later Christian interpolation. Doherty is not making that up: most scholars are in agreement about this, and it is pretty clear they are right. As Muller rightly puts it, there is "an interruption in the flow of the narrative, at 11.2-22, which again proves to be an interpolation; it reports on Mary and Joseph, the birth of the Saviour and his crucifixion" (*New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, pp. 604-605). If you read it, it is clearly not in the same style or flow of the

narrative, and adds what is not mentioned in the orders given to Jesus earlier. Moreover, the narrative flow is restored by skipping the interpolation. To wit, 11.1 + 11.23-24:

11.1. *After this I saw, and the angel who spoke with me, who conducted me, said unto me: "Understand, Isaiah son of Amoz; for this purpose have I been sent from God." ... [?excised text?] ... 23. And I saw Him, and He was in the firmament, but He had not changed Himself into their form, and all the angels of the firmament and the Satans saw Him and they worshipped. 24. And there was much sorrow there, while they said: "How did our Lord descend in our midst, and we perceived not the glory, which we see has been upon Him from the sixth heaven?"*

Then he reascends, repeating the narrative flow of the earlier section. It is clear from these passages that the original text did not have a section where Jesus went *past* the firmament and incarnated on earth (rather than the *aer*)—the surprise of the demons makes less sense otherwise (because they don't mention him passing them, and the earlier orders said he was to judge and overcome *them*, not any powers on earth, etc.).

I am quite certain Doherty is right here—he has the majority of scholars behind him, including the top experts on this very text. [*Knibb himself, though, hedges here, and suggests that the 11:2-22 passage was part of the original text, for reasons which don't make much sense—see my Appendix 4 in The Jesus Puzzle.*] But Muller is right when he suggests the possibility that the pre-interpolation text might be a later celestialization of an originally terrestrial Jesus, or might have been a pre-Christian Type that was then mapped onto a real Jesus who died under Pilate, etc. The case can't really be decided, in my opinion. Both views are plausible. Doherty does have the edge in that his thesis is a simpler explanation of various bizarre silences in Paul, but the simpler hypothesis is not always true. So if Doherty has anything over the alternative, it is a small lead, as I have said, which is not enough to settle the matter in his favor, in my opinion. It only produces agnosticism. Doherty and I disagree about this, but I can only tell you the way things seem to me.

The degree of hair-splitting here on Carrier's part (and he does this frequently in his review of my book) I have always found curious. I have the edge, but it's only by the smallest of margins, it seems. In this and in other aspects of my case, my "win" has to be acknowledged, but only by the fewest number of points. Moreover, in regard to this particular document, I question whether agnosticism is a viable vantage point, that it is at all conceivable that such a picture as we find here could have been mapped onto a real Jesus who died under Pilate. Carrier has admitted that the only passage suggesting a life on earth for a real man and a crucifixion by Pilate is a later interpolation. Can anyone possibly understand how such a creation as the Vision of Isaiah without that passage could have been composed by a writer who (a) knew of a human Jesus on earth, or (b) was consciously "mapping" his story of the Son operating entirely within the spheres of heaven onto a human Jesus who had recently lived on earth and enacted his redemptive role there? It is all well and good—and I sympathize—to be faithful to the principles of one's discipline and not make commitments to theses that are theoretically lacking in all the proper and sufficient evidence or degree of evidence; but that should not preclude bringing in common-sense approaches to help decide which alternatives are more probable or even certain. It is simply not feasible that the "pre-interpolation text might be a later celestialization of an originally terrestrial Jesus."

It may be slightly more feasible that the original "Vision" was taken from a 'non-Christian' source (though one that would clearly be of a 'proto-Christian' nature, illustrating lines of development) and applied to an existing terrestrial Jesus figure (whether authentic or only imagined). In that case, the interpolation and possibly the insertions of the name Jesus—and perhaps Christ—could have taken place at that point. But I similarly question whether such an

editor taking over an external document would not have reworked key passages such as those under discussion here, to reflect his awareness of Jesus' life on earth. On the other hand, my judgment has been that when a community already possesses a document which is its own product, and its ideas toward some of the subject matter in it evolve, insertions tend to be made but not wholesale revision of all the earlier material; the latter is simply reinterpreted. (I have argued this in regard to the evolving stages of Q, and in the case of the Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers. For the latter, see my Supplementary Article No. 5: Tracing the Christian Lineage in Alexandria.)

Incidentally, that interpolation is certainly of a primitive nature, and must reflect very early views of an historical Jesus. It would be interesting to speculate whether it is based on some Ur-Gospel piece of writing which the later canonical Gospels have left behind. The "nativity" scene in 11:2-15 cannot be dependent upon those of Matthew or Luke. The infant is born in Mary and Joseph's house in Bethlehem, it arrives unexpectedly (the birth causes "astonishment" to Mary), and there are none of the details we find in Matthew and Luke's renditions. The rest of the interpolation is very brief, making cursory reference to the performance of "signs and miracles in the land of Israel and Jerusalem," and to the crucifixion and resurrection in this way:

11.19. *And after this the adversary [Satan] envied him and roused the children of Israel, who did not know who he was, against him. And they handed him to the ruler, and crucified him, and he descended to the angel who (is) in Sheol. 20. In Jerusalem, indeed, I saw how they crucified him on a tree, 21. and likewise (how) after the third day he rose and remained (many) days... 22. And I saw when he sent out the twelve disciples and ascended.*

The identity of the "ruler" in verse 19 is not specified, though Knibb opines: "a word normally translated 'king,' but it is presumably Pilate who is meant (cf. Mt 27:2)." It certainly is a presumption on Knibb's part, but it's quite possible this interpolation comes from a time when the earthly crucifier of Jesus was not necessarily regarded by all as having been Pontius Pilate. Certainly, the rest of the material here is decidedly uninformative and very primitive in detail. Indeed, some of its features are barely a step above the pre-interpolation stage, and there are signs of those features simply growing out of features of the latter, as though the latter are being reworked to provide material for the new picture being formulated. We have the "envy" of the children of Israel (compare the envy of the demons), the descent to Sheol immediately after death (fulfilling God's directions for the Son's sojourn to the lower heavens), the crucifixion "on a tree" by the ruler (compare the hanging "upon a tree" by the evil angels of the firmament in 9:14), the motif of "not knowing who he is" now transferred to the children of Israel. There is also a notable disruption of sequence between verse 20 and 21. After crucifixion he descends to Sheol; then the interpolator (or later editor) backs up and speaks further of his crucifixion and gives him a resurrection after three days and a period on earth (which period varies between manuscripts); finally (v. 22) the appointment of apostles and an ascension is added. Curiously, throughout this entire passage, the name Jesus is not used once. Speculation on this would be just that, but one wonders if this is a good indicator that Knibb is right in suggesting that the names "Jesus" and "Christ" were added to the entire document only later, and that this interpolation comes quite early (barely before the mental ink was dry on the idea of an historical incarnation of the "Son"), continuing in the thought patterns of the earlier stage of the Vision of Isaiah. Although it is difficult to postulate what sort of relationship the ideas of the interpolation might have had with the creation of the Gospel of Mark, there is one other connection that could be put forward. I have suggested that there is no way to tell what name the later stages of Q used for the founder figure it introduced into the sayings collection. It may not have been "Jesus" and another name may only have been converted to Jesus when the synoptic Gospels incorporated the Q traditions. Did the earliest ideas of an historical figure not entail the name "Jesus" as the Ascension of Isaiah might suggest?

To return to Muller:

But there is still more evidence against Doherty's assertions. Let's reveal them by answering these questions:

- a) In 'the Ascension of Isaiah', is the Son arrested in the firmament?
- b) If Satan and his evil angels are involved in the crucifixion, does that mean it was not on earth?

2.5.3. The Son Goes Through The Firmament To Earth:

This is according to these verses:

10:29-31 "And again [from 1st heaven] **He Descended Into The Firmament** where dwelleth the ruler of this world, and He gave the password to those on the left, and His form was like theirs, and they did not praise Him there; but they were envying one another and fighting; for here there is a power of evil and envying about trifles. **And I Saw When He Descended** [below the firmament!] **And Made Himself Like Unto The Angels Of The Air....**"

[Carrier:] Notice that every time before, he identifies the destination, but here he does not—except when he names only one location: the *aer*. Earth is nowhere mentioned. The *aer* corresponds to the lower level of the firmament (it is the last stop above the "lower waters" that God has separated out from the firmament). Still, one can imagine that this was at some point mapped onto an angel who went all the way down to earth (through Docetism).

10:8 "Go forth and descent **Through All The Heavens** [that would include the air between earth and moon!], and you will descent to the firmament and **That World** [**Earth**: see note a) below]: to the angel in Sheol you will descend [after death]...."

[Carrier:] Wrong again. "That world" refers to the whole region (see below) and in particular Sheol (standard forward pronoun). Earth specifically is never mentioned, so it cannot possibly be the object of any pronoun here. Likewise, the descent to Sheol is not "after" death but rather **is** death—it indicates that Jesus is to die, which **entails** descending to Sheol.

Notes:

a) In the two closest previous occurrences of "**That World**", at 9:20 & 9:26, the expression means "**Earth**" only.

- 9:20-23 "Show me how everything which is done in **That World** [earth, confirmation later] is **Here** [7th heaven] made known." And whilst I [Isaiah] was still speaking with him, behold one of the angels who stood nigh, ... who had **Raised Me Up From The World** [**Earth**: ch.7:2-3]. Showed me a book, and he opened it, and the book was written, but **Not As A Book Of This World** [not written on earth]. And he gave (it) to me and I read it, and lo! the deeds of **The Children Of Israel** were written therein, and the deeds of those whom I know (not), **My Son Josab**. And I said: "In truth, there is nothing hidden in the seventh heaven, which is **Done In This World** [earth again]."

- 9:24-26 "And I [Isaiah] saw **There** many garments laid up [in the highest heaven], and many thrones and many crowns. And I said to the angel: "Whose are these garments and thrones and crowns?" And he said unto me: "These garments **Many** from **That World** [Christians] will receive [in the future!] believing in the words of That One, ... and they **Will** observe those things, and believe in them, and **Believe In His Cross**: for them are these laid up."

All occurrences of "world" from 9:20 to 10:7 are for (only) the earth. Why would the next "world" (at 10:8) mean the firmament or the air below it? More so when, in the 'Ascension of Isaiah', the firmament (or the air below) is never considered a world on its own!

[Carrier:] First, words must be read in context: a pronoun takes the meaning of the nearest available object. Muller's argument here is like saying every time I say "that man" I mean the same man I referred to in a previous chapter, instead of the man I just mentioned, or will then mention. That is just silly. No language on earth functions that way. Second, 9:20 does not refer to earth per se. Instead, the firmament is alluded to. See 9:14: "the god of that world will stretch forth his hand against the Son..." Where is the "god"? In the firmament, in the *aer* (this is explicitly stated at 10.29 and 10.10-12, where "that world" is unmistakably the firmament). It certainly does not say it is on earth.

Muller is probably confused by the fact that "this world" is everything below the orb of the moon, i.e. everything under the first heaven. Thus, its contents include the firmament, the *aer*, and the earth and even Sheol (everything subject to decay—and hence Satan rules over all of these as one unit—at least until Jesus triumphs over him). That is why one can certainly see ambiguity here—to be in "that world" can mean being in the *aer*, the firmament or on earth. In that one respect Muller is right, since Doherty's thesis is not entirely proved here. It could be consistent with it, yes, but the text is also consistent with the notion of mapping this celestial story onto a real man (whether the celestial Type pre-existed a real Jesus or not)....

And yet, chapter 9 (which I will discuss in greater detail shortly) does not leave room for the hanging by Satan and his demons to take place on earth.

I am surprised, though, that Muller appears so confused about this, since he seems to understand it. He himself says: "the firmament is never considered a world on its own, but sometimes (only) a part of the one including earth (and the air above)." That isn't exactly true (the firmament was always distinguished from the earth—cf. Genesis, and the earlier part of the Ascension of Isaiah), but the phrase "this world" does indeed include all these things as one unit. Why Muller doesn't realize how this undermines his own argument I can't explain....

2.5.4. Satan Can Kill People On Earth Also (From Heaven!):

The OT book of Job demonstrates the belief that Satan could inflict havoc on earth and have a long reach, with or without leaving heaven....

[Carrier:] Correct. Satan rules over the whole region below the orb of the moon—and that includes the firmament, the *aer*, the earth, and Sheol (which is why we need Jesus to escape Sheol). See 1 Cor. 15: only at the second coming [*Paul never states, here or anywhere else, that Jesus' future coming will be a "second coming"—Carrier, like so many others, has read this into the epistles*] will this reign of Satan be destroyed. That is why Paul talks about death being an enemy to be completely defeated. He means decay: i.e. the fact that everything below the orb of the moon is subject to decay, which is due to Satan (or allegorically equated as Satan). That very fact will be abolished, because everything in that realm will be destroyed—and so Satan will no longer have anything over which to rule. Satan himself will then be subjugated (or destroyed—it is not clear). But the fact that Satan rules over this entire region below the heavens does not mean he does not conduct his business from his throne in the firmament, just as God conducts his from his throne in the seventh heaven. Thus, to defeat Satan you have to go to his throne, which the text says is in the firmament, not on earth. So obviously that is where Jesus has to go....

But again, Muller is certainly right that Jesus could be "killed" on earth by a Satan in the firmament. And since everything on earth is paralleled in the firmament, I can certainly see how a Christian could map this celestial battle with Satan onto a historical Jesus—both happening at once. Therefore, Doherty's thesis fits and explains the evidence (contra Muller), but is not thereby proved (pro Muller).

And yet, the document itself virtually rules this out, and Carrier has already presented his analysis of the text in such a way as to indicate this. He says: "So again Doherty is right: Jesus was to descend to the *firmament*, then Sheol, *not* earth. Earth is never mentioned here." This was in reference to chapter 10, in which God gives instructions to the Son as to what he is to do and where he is to go in his descent to the lower world. In 10:12 (quoted by Carrier), the Son's instructions are to "*destroy the princes and angels and gods of that world, and the world that is dominated by them.*" This is hardly a directive to destroy the human rulers on the earth. Verse 13 makes that clear: "*For they have denied Me and said: 'We alone are and there is none beside us.'*" This refers to the evil angels of the firmament who claim that they are supreme and that there are no higher gods than themselves.

Chapter 9 is virtually as clear, and this would be the time to look at some of it in detail. From verse 13 to 17 it reads (taken from the translation by M. Knibb in the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*):

9.13: *The Lord will indeed descend into the world in the last days, (he) who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form, and they will think that he is flesh and a man.* 14. *And the god of that world will stretch out his hand against the Son, and they will lay their hands upon him and hang him upon a tree, not knowing who he is.* 15. *And thus his descent, as you will see, will be concealed even from the heavens so that it will not be known who he is.* 16. *And when he has plundered the angel of death, he will rise [lit., "ascend" notes Knibb] on the third day and will remain in that world for five hundred and forty-five days.* 17. *And then many of the righteous will ascend with him, whose spirits do not receive (their) robes until the Lord Christ ascends and they ascend with him.*

The flow of this passage is somewhat uneven, suggesting redaction somewhere along the line. Knibb is of the opinion that the reference to remaining in the world for 545 days "may be an addition to the text." Both of the other manuscript lines do not have it, and it may have been inserted by a later editor influenced by gnostic sources since, as Knibb notes, the time period fits Valentinian and Ophite beliefs. As in chapter 10, there is no specific mention of earth in these verses. It is the "god of that world" (Satan) and his minions who do the hanging; it is they who do not know who he is. His identity is concealed from "the heavens," no inclusion of earth being specified. The point I made earlier about bringing common sense to one's interpretation of a document applies again here: If the writer of this passage knew of a life on earth for the Son, he could hardly have failed to indicate it in some way. If he knew or believed that human rulers had actually performed the physical crucifixion, in history, it is not feasible that he would confine himself to describing it solely in heavenly terms, at the hands of a heavenly agency, within a context of descent and ascent which never includes earth. The phrase "*they will think that he is flesh and a man,*" if not docetic (and I have argued against that above), indicates that he was *not* a man in the mind of this writer, relegating the idea to the context of descending deities taking on the forms of each "world," each sphere through which they pass. Even the reference to the 545 days is not specified as on earth, but only "in that world," betraying again that lack of focus on earth itself. Considering that the Valentinians (at least at the time of their Gospel of Truth) seem to have had no sense of an historical Jesus—not even a docetic one—the possible borrowing of this idea from them does not of itself necessarily indicate the concept of a human man.

It might be asked: if this is the firmament, encompassing the first spirit level of the *aer*, as well as the earth, why did the Son adopt the "form" of a human man and not one of the angels of the firmament, since in all the other spheres he simply assumes the form of an angel of that level? In fact, in 10:30, upon the Son entering the firmament, Isaiah says that "I saw when he descended and made himself like the angels of the air, that he was like one of them." They failed even to notice him, being too busy with their own warring. At some point subsequent to this, the Son

adopts the form of a human, and that is when they perceive him and proceed to dispatch him on the tree. Thus, the human form was necessary; Satan would hardly be moved to hang up what he thought was one of his own angels. But there is another necessity involved. The paradigm principle, the homologic parallel I discussed in Part One, reflected in early Christian writings like the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11, required the god not only to descend to the 'fleshly' territory but to assume the form of those linked to him, of those he would "save" (in this case, of the revived spirits in Sheol who would ascend with the Son). Thus the Son's assumption of human form does not require that he actually descended to earth itself. Again, if that was the writer's thought, some indication of that life on earth would have emerged in the text. We can see that it emerged in no uncertain terms when a later editor added twenty verses to chapter 11 to reflect that very idea of an earthly life. These considerations cannot simply be ignored or dismissed in order to hold onto a theoretical principle that the whole thing, with all its focus on the heavens and silence about earth, could still be "mapped" onto a human man. Not only does my thesis explain the evidence, the evidence supports the thesis, and I think Carrier's distinction between the two—while it does exist—is a little too adamantly pressed at times. Again I will say, we cannot bring in the word "proof" with its connotations and demands in other contexts and hold out for agnosticism while ignoring the balance of probability. And where this document is concerned, I maintain that we are in a position of virtual certainty.

One might press the questions associated with this picture of ancient soteriology even further, and ask, what would a being disguised as a human man be thought to be doing in the firmament, and why would Satan attack him for no good reason? Of course, that's the way those miserable demons are, and the overriding requirement would be that the Son had to be killed while in the form of his believers, and anyway not much in ancient philosophy really makes a lot of sense to our modern minds. I have no idea how any rational person even at that stage could have believed that any of this bore a relation to reality (other than allegorical, as the more sophisticated philosophers tended to view things). No writer ever tries to explain how the homologic parallel principle works—certainly not Paul in Romans 6. But then, we face a similar situation in regard to atonement sacrifice and the forgiveness of sin effected by the shedding of blood, principles at the heart of Christian soteriology, then *and* now. Does anyone understand how the slaughter of animals and the burning of their blood on the altar served intercessory purposes for a sanguinary Yahweh, or why the slaughter of the Son of God on Calvary was needed to redeem the world's sins? No writer, Old Testament or New, ever attempts an explanation. It is simply part of the philosophical and ritual landscape, going back to primitive beginnings in the mists of prehistoric times. Too many in our society even in the 21st century are still tied to those primitive beginnings.

Both Muller and Carrier are being picayune over a little detail in 9.14:

Note: in his meandering fuzzy discussion in order to suggest Jesus is crucified on the firmament (despite the clear-cut evidence against it!) Doherty lacks accuracy (purposely?):

a) Earl writes on page 107: "this hanging is something performed by "the god of this world," meaning Satan." But the hanging in question is never said to be done by Satan / the_god_of_this_world, neither in Paul's epistles, nor 'Ascension of Isaiah'. Doherty is therefore misleading here.

This is desperation. And yet Carrier can say:

Muller is right that Doherty is misleading here. It is not literally true that Satan does the hanging (any more than Pilate or Herod or Caiaphas did), but his agents. Muller is at least right that this can mean people on earth. But it can also mean demons. So Doherty is not thereby refuted. Both are possible, and I don't see adequate evidence to decide between them.

So if I say that "Pilate crucified Jesus," I "lack accuracy (purposely?)." I'm sure that this "misleading" statement has been made millions of times over the centuries. Muller invites scorn by reaching for such a petty criticism. And let's consider how Muller thinks to use it by looking again at the sentence in question: *"And the god of that world will stretch out his hand against the Son, and they will lay their hands upon him and hang him upon a tree, not knowing who he is."* Is this change of pronouns intended to convey a sudden switch from firmament to earth, the latter referring to the Romans, whom Muller claims "could qualify for the 'they' "? This from a writer who never refers to the earth's surface, let alone any "they's" upon it? The change is hardly so dramatic. It simply reflects the change of perspective from one thought to the other: Satan initiates the assault on the Son, his evil angels perform the deed itself. Muller claims:

Note: here, Satan will eventually identify the Son and take action against him; but the "they", who are the ones actually doing the "hanging", do not know him! It does not look Satan and the others belong to the same clique!

There is nothing in the passage that even implies that Satan identifies the Son before the hanging takes place. In fact, in the following verse 15, it is stated that the Son's identify is concealed "from the heavens" which would include Satan himself. And when we get to the other side of the interpolation in chapter 11, when the Son leaves Sheol to ascend the heavens on his return trip, Isaiah says: *"And I saw him, and he was in the firmament, but was not transformed into their form. And all the angels of the firmament, and Satan, saw him and worshiped. And there was much sorrow there as they said, 'How did our Lord descend upon us, and we did not notice the glory which was upon him, which we (now) see was upon him from the sixth heaven?'"* Clearly, there was no identifying of the Son on the way down, including by Satan, before performing the hanging. Now that they know who he is, they "worship" him, not hang him again. This obvious ignorance at the point of killing the "Lord" of "glory" is the exact parallel to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:8, "None of the rulers of this age (which a "majority"—so Paul Ellingworth—of scholars take as the demon spirits) understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

Apparently it is not only the demons who have failed to understand. On the basis of misread and misinterpreted trifles like these, Muller thinks to hang *me* on some tree (even if I don't claim the title of Lord of glory):

So all the main arguments of Doherty for a crucifixion in some demonic lower heaven, as appearing in his section "the descent of the Son" in chapter 10, are unfounded. And that goes against the evidence from the ancient text of Earl's own choosing!

I would also question Carrier's concurring judgment in regard to verse 14. Does he, too, think that the change of pronoun is so significant that it *could* entail a shift of the writer's meaning from the firmament to earth, from Satan to Pilate? I would point out the same considerations that make this highly unlikely. Thus I cannot agree that "both [meanings] are possible," or that there is no "adequate evidence to decide between them."

Muller, from 9:14, suddenly jumps without warning (and without clarity) to chapter 10:

And as we saw, no hanging occurs when the Son is going down through the firmament.

Carrier detects the jump and deals with it:

Probably because the relevant passage was excised when the interpolation was inserted in its place. Unless 9:14 is also an interpolation, we should expect the hanging to take place between

10:31 and 11:23, but all we have is the Christian forgery there now. So we can't say what had been there originally.

In fact, let's take a look again at how the two parts join together when the interpolation is removed. Following on the end of chapter 10 and the first verse of chapter 11, we will jump to the other side of the interpolation, to 11:23...

10.30. *And I saw when he descended [into the firmament] and made himself like the angels of the air, that he was like one of them. And he did not give the password, for they were plundering and doing violence to one another.* 11.1. *And after this I looked, and the angel who spoke to me and led me said to me, "Understand, Isaiah son of Amoz, because for this purpose I was sent from the Lord"....* 11.23. *And I saw him, and he was in the firmament but was not transformed into their form. And all the angels of the firmament, and Satan, saw him and worshiped.*

Clearly, there is something missing between 11.1 and 11.23. (The space is taken up now with the interpolation.) The original text breaks off when the Son has just entered the firmament during his descent, and picks up again when he is reentering the firmament (from Sheol) for his ascent back to heaven. For Muller to point to the missing hanging by Satan in this situation, as though this somehow eradicates it from chapter 9 (by homologic parallel perhaps), where there is no interpolation, is crudely disingenuous. In chapter 9, all that takes place between the hanging in the firmament and the rising after three days is the 'plundering of the angel/prince of death,' a reference to the descent into Sheol to claim the spirits of the righteous who ascend with him back to heaven. Since chapter 10-11 is an enlargement on the whole descent and ascent process, we may assume that in the missing portion above, there was a fuller account of the hanging in the firmament and the descent into Sheol to rescue the dead. Accordingly, this is the point where the editor decided to place his interpolation of a life for the Son on earth, and the original material had to be jettisoned.

Incidentally, what do we find at this point in the two other manuscript lines? I'd better mention here that there are three classes of surviving manuscripts of the Ascension: Ethiopic, second Latin, and Slavonic. The first is thought to be based on one Greek text, the other two on a different Greek text. (Note that there are no extant mss. of any earlier Greek versions.) There are notable differences between the Ethiopic on the one hand, and the second Latin and Slavonic on the other. One of the reasons why most scholars on the Ascension (but not Knibb) regard the interpolation as just that, is because it is missing in the Slavonic and second Latin manuscripts. They would hardly have removed this passage if it had been there in the original. However, there is a brief verse in the gap in both the Latin and Slavonic, and it is the same. It runs like this (following on 11:1): "...to show you all things. For no one before you has seen, nor after you will be able to see, what you have seen and heard. And I saw one like a son of man, and he dwelt with men in the world, and they did not recognize him." Now, neither the Latin nor the Slavonic is considered dependent on the other, so this passage must be taken from an earlier version on which they both depended, but on which the Ethiopic did not. It is interesting that the second sentence of that 'filler' has the look of an insertion itself, but an extremely primitive one. It states nothing more than the basic idea that the Son become "one like a son of man," that is, human, and dwelt in the world. First of all, that this sparse statement was ever substituted for the longer Ethiopic interpolation—which would seem to be required by Knibb's position—is simply not feasible. What it seems to be is an interpolation somewhere back along the line out of which the Latin and Slavonic grew, even earlier than the Ethiopic which represents a more detailed development of the idea that the Son had been to earth. So we actually have two reflections of the evolution of the thought of this document, and both of them involve the insertion of the idea of an earthly incarnation for the Son. This is the evolution of the historical Jesus before our very eyes, and cannot fit into Carrier's option of the whole thing being mapped onto a figure who was

regarded as historical from the very beginning.

But to go on. Muller's confusion and misrepresentation reaches a peak here:

On page 96, Earl places Sheol below earth (as believed in antiquity):

"Near the bottom ... lay humanity's sphere, the material **Earth**; only **Sheol** or Hades, the underworld, was **Lower**."

But on page 108, when the Sheol of 'Ascension of Isaiah' **Needs** to be above earth (so the Son does not go too far down!), we have:

"Outside of this one passage,

[reference to part of "Chapter 11", according to Doherty. However, relating to earthly surroundings, there is a second one: 3:13-4:22]

the Son's activities **Seem** to relate entirely to **The Spirit Realm, Layers Of Heaven** extending through the firmament and **Including Sheol**."

If the location becomes against your theory, change it!

The statement Muller quotes above, coming as a summary at the end of my chapter in *The Jesus Puzzle* on the crucifixion of the divine Christ and the discussion of the Ascension of Isaiah, hardly implies that I have shifted the location of Sheol from the underworld to the bottom of the firmament. (Which would place it right above the ground, resting on the heads of humans themselves!) No reasonable person would attribute that to me, especially as I had already indicated on an earlier page (as Muller points out) that Sheol lay *under* the earth. While there may be a technical ambiguity on how I have phrased that sentence (Sheol, being in essence a spirit layer—even though below the earth—is "included" within "the spirit realm" for the purposes of what I am saying), only the most obtuse interpreter and dishonorable critic would take such an ambiguity and run with it to the point of insult. Carrier agrees:

This I think is unfair to Doherty, who I do not think was doing what Muller alleges. But Doherty is vague enough here to confuse the likes of Muller, so I would certainly recommend clarity in future editions. I am sure Doherty means just what the ancients imagined of Inanna: that she descends past earth. It does not mean she ever stopped there. And this is entailed by ancient theology: if Jesus went to the firmament and died there, he would **have** to descend to Sheol. For that is what death **means**.... Thus, Muller's critique of Doherty here seems terribly misinformed and confused. Doherty is not saying anything implausible here—indeed, what he is saying follows necessarily from what we know about ancient cosmology. **If** Jesus died in the firmament than he **had** to descend past earth into Sheol....

Before going on, there was an interesting exchange between Muller and Carrier centered on the book of Job:

2.5.5. Satan And His Evil Angels Can Also Be On Earth:

Let's go back to the book of Job:

Job1:7 NKJV "And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "**From Going To And Fro On The Earth, and From Walking Back And Forth On It.**"....

[Carrier:] Ironically, Muller didn't notice that this refutes his earlier contention that there was no evidence of descending & ascending deities. He is correct here: Satan, before his Fall, was indeed a mediary deity who routinely descended from heaven to earth and ascended back again. The book of Job proves it. The Book of Job, of course, refers to pre-fall Satan. After the Fall (which took place before Christianity but after Job's day), Satan refused to reascend to the hall of the Lord and instead decided to do things for himself below the moon and thus rule there. In ancient Jewish Angelology this is intelligible, since the angels were granted godlike powers and

sent below to do God's bidding (since it was vulgar to even imagine God himself taking on a body or mingling with corrupt matter, hence he had to carry out his will through intermediaries—indeed, some Jewish sects took the logical step of believing that creation was accomplished by such a mediary). Thus, once an angel decided not to obey God anymore, he could indeed set up rule down here, thus necessitating God's plan of sending another mediary to depose the rebel. It should be clear how the Fall of Satan, a pre-Christian idea, *requires* a descending savior myth. Thus, it is hardly any surprise that several such myths would be formulated. This is a fact routinely overlooked by Evangelicals who think Christianity just came out of the blue and was completely novel and unexpected. To the contrary, it was inevitable. Still, one could map such a celestial event onto a historical man—though one didn't have to. So either is possible.

Not only was it natural and inevitable that the descending savior myth would develop in the context of ancient views of the universe, we would expect it to be natural (and inevitable) that the Christian version of this widespread type of mythology would begin precisely as a reflection of all the others, namely as the descent of a *spiritual* figure working in the spiritual parts of the world with beneficial affects on humans in the material ("fleshly") realm. And lo and behold, that is exactly the focus we find in the early Christian epistles and the pre-interpolation Ascension of Isaiah, while the concept of actual incarnation into a human, earthly man is missing. If the latter *were* in the background, such a dramatic departure from the norm would *require* addressing. A mapping onto an historical man would be so out of character, would raise so many questions, silence and ambiguity could not be allowed to stand. Nor would the human mind function that way.

This exclusive focus on the heavenly realm, with Christ as a heavenly agent and mediary, is especially evident in the Pauline corpus and in Hebrews. The Son is described exclusively in terms of his Platonic character as creator and sustainer of the universe (1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:15-20, Heb. 1:1-3), with no identification with an historical man. The Son's prominent role in salvation is through the process of defeating the demon spirits (as in Col. 2:15 and the Ascension of Isaiah) and restoring the unity of the two parts of the universe, which Satan and his evil angels had sundered in this present "age" of the world (Eph. 1:10). One of the major motifs in the epistle to the Hebrews is the superiority of the Son to the angels. The angels were God's intermediaries in the past, the Son is the new intermediary; God spoke formerly through the prophets, now he speaks through the Son. But that superiority is demonstrated solely through scripture; there is no mention of the Son's incarnation to earth or his powerful deeds there. The "voice" of the Son in his earthly ministry is never sounded, only the voice in scripture, which is to say, in the new interpretation of scripture. Revelation and the power of the Holy Spirit, operating largely through scripture, is the sole driving force of the Christian version of the savior myth. Over the context of its time, Christianity with a mythical Christ fits like a glove. Agnosticism—at least where the cultic stream represented by Paul is concerned—is not justified.

And Muller doesn't let off beating a dead horse:

...and the 'Ascension of Isaiah':

4:2 "... Beliar [Satan] the great ruler, the king of this world, will descend, who hath ruled it since it came into being; yea, he **Will Descent From His Firmament** [to earth] ..."

[Carrier:] Another universally recognized Christian interpolation (3:13-4:22 certainly did not exist in the Maccabean original!), and thus useless for making Muller's point. Indeed, chs. 1-5 actually come from a completely different text—only later merged with 6-11. Had Muller actually conducted himself like a scholar, he would know this. It is stated even in standard references! Can't Muller at least consult Eerdman's or the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian

Church or something, anything, before writing his uninformed opinions? I chastise for a reason: Doherty's thesis deserves better scholarship from its critics.

Amen, brother.

The Crucifixion in Paul

Following the lengthy discussion of the Ascension of Isaiah, Muller asks the question,

2.6. Is there evidence in Paul's epistles about the crucifixion on earth? Yes, there is (twice!). It may not be very direct, but this evidence is much more Doherty can offer in favor of his own demonic world!

What follows is an overlong, confused and confusing argument examining Romans 9:31-33 and 11:26-27 which I am going to largely pass over. If this is the extent of the "evidence" in Paul that he envisioned an earthly crucifixion, then the mythicist case will win hands down. First, I'll let Carrier make a few comments about it.

I can't follow Muller's argument here at all. I see no way to get from Romans 9:31-33 that Jesus was crucified on earth. The passage is fully consistent with only the Gospel [*Paul's preaching message, which I usually spell with a small 'g'*] being on earth, not the crucifixion itself. Muller seems not to understand the difference. The Gospel is a stumbling block, not the literal, historical crucifixion of Jesus. After all, the latter no longer exists—it is in the past—so you can't trip over it....You can only trip over the story, the message, about this crucifixion and what it means. Thus, the subject is the Gospel, not the crucifixion itself. Obviously the Gospel was placed in Zion. That does not mean Jesus was. Sure, it is consistent with both possibilities. But that gets us nowhere.

Muller in his argument throws in a reference to the "stumbling block" found in 1 Corinthians 1. Here is its context:

For Paul, the "stone of stumbling" and the "rock of **Offence**" for the Jews is Christ ("For Christ is [the] end of **Law For Righteousness** to every one that believes." Ro10:4 Darby) by his sacrifice on the cross....

This is confirmed by:

- 1Co1:23 YLT "... **Christ Crucified**, to Jews, **Indeed**, a **Stumbling-Block** ['skandalon', also translated as "offenc(s)e" or "scandal"] ..."

- Gal5:11 NKJV "... the **Offense** ['skandalon'] **Of The Cross** ..."

As I argue at length in my Supplementary Article No. 1, Apollos and the Early Christian Apostolate, the scandal, the stumbling-block, is the fact of "Christ crucified," not simply some interpretation of it, and certainly not the significance or divine identity of the man who had supposedly undergone this crucifixion in Jerusalem. What of the even greater scandal that Paul never mentions, either in 1 Corinthians 1 or anywhere else: that a man had been turned into God, that a crucified criminal had been elevated to the status of Savior of the world? That would have been a stumbling block of immensely greater proportions than the idea of a crucified Messiah. The latter idea, which is all that Paul mentions, would have been entirely at home in a mythical setting, like those of the mystery deities or the descending-ascending savior mythology discussed above. Indeed, since this is the only issue Paul addresses in contrasting the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God (meaning his own message), we can safely say that the spirit-world nature of his Christ is the only one in view. I have argued that a careful interpretation of 1 Corinthians, chapters 1 and 3, with all that Paul says about Apollos in Corinth, makes it clear

that Apollos is among those rivals whom Paul associates with the "wisdom of the world" and with the rejection of the fact of "Christ crucified." The only setting in which a Christian missionary could be guilty of such a rejection, and in which Christian converts of Paul could have gone along with it, would be if all concepts of Christ, including the fact of his crucifixion, were derived from scripture and revelation, and thus all such doctrines were competing on a level playing-field. That view is fully consistent with Paul's declarations (as in Romans 1:2 and Galatians 1:11-12) that his gospel is something he has derived from scripture and revelation, not from historical tradition, and that is the way we must interpret the source of his gospel as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. When we add to this picture the several statements he makes that the resurrection of Christ (and even the *death* of Christ) are articles of *faith* (as in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:12f), something revealed by God, we have no grounds for agnosticism where the early epistle writers are concerned.

Finally, Muller addresses the significance of the term "Zion" as used by Paul in Romans:

"And so all **Israel** will be saved, **As It Is Written: "The Deliverer Will Come Out Of Zion,** and He will turn away ungodliness from **Jacob [Israel (Ge32:28)]; for This Is My Covenant With Them [Jews], when I Take Away Their Sins."**.....

'Zion' In The OT

All over the OT, 'Zion' is referred many times, as indicating an earthly place, either the heartland of the Jews (including or excluding Jerusalem), or the holy city itself, or part of the later: that is the temple mount, also called mount Zion, or the "city of David", on the ridge southwards. Here are some examples (all quotes from the NKJV): [*Muller lists close to a dozen examples*]....

Note: in the OT, Zion is never described as a (mythical) heavenly place.

So ideas never change, even over centuries. Old scriptural passages are never reinterpreted by new thinkers and sects. When Paul says he got his gospel from the scriptures (*kata tas graphas*) he only drew conclusions from them which everyone else had.... (Sigh).

[Carrier:] First, Zion has a heavenly counterpart (Heb. 12:22) and in fact Zion was a common name for the Heavenly Jerusalem, meaning the New City that would descend from the heavens and replace the earth[*ly one?*] when earth (including the Old Jerusalem) is consumed by fire. Second, Zion is also a racial term. To come "out of Zion" means to come from the race of the Jews. It does not always mean coming from any literal physical place....

Enough of this. Let's go on to Hebrews, since that document is my personal favorite after the Odes of Solomon, and I consider it possibly the single most important non-Gospel document in support of the mythicist theory....(unless it be all the others).

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Muller begins:

2.7. 'Hebrews' and the sacrifice in heaven:

On page 120, Doherty valiantly declares: "No other New Testament document so clearly illustrates the higher and lower world thinking of Platonic philosophy as the epistle to the Hebrews." Then he continues: "The writer places the sacrifice in heaven itself, in "the real sanctuary, the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man" (8:2)".

Let's observe the whole aforementioned verse (with the preceding one):

Heb8:1-2 YLT "And the sum concerning the things spoken of [is]: we have such a chief priest [Jesus], who did sit down at the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens, of the holy places ['Hagion'] a servant, and of the true tabernacle [tent, shelter], which the Lord did set up, and not man,"

I do not see here (or in the whole of 'Hebrews'!) a "sacrifice" occurring in heaven (at the right hand of God!). And there is no mention of execution, cross or altar in these two verses. Just that Jesus, as the Lord in heaven, is a servant/minister of the holy places & "true" tabernacle. And from which translation does "the **Real** sanctuary" come from? **"real" Is Not In The Greek!**

Apparently, Muller's proficiency in Greek is as deficient as his understanding of ancient cosmology. Carrier says (and I will dispute his comment that it is my "translation" that has "confused Muller" rather than his own deficiency in Greek, especially since it is not *my* translation):

Yes it is. Doherty's translation has confused Muller again. The word is *alēthinēs* ("real, true, genuine"). It is certainly in that verse—though, as Muller later rightly notes, it modifies tabernacle, not holy places. This still supports Doherty's lesser point that Jesus is the Heavenly Priest in the "True" Tabernacle (i.e. the real Jerusalem Temple in Heaven), but Doherty's translation is misleading, at least in that it has confused his own critics, and is not relevant to where the sacrifice takes place. On the one hand, Muller is clearly out of his element here. But Doherty, too, needs to be more rigorous....[And] Muller is correct that Doherty is citing the wrong verse in support of his argument as to where the sacrifice takes place.

First, Carrier's final comment (which actually came earlier): I'm not sure of the need for this criticism here. The sentence Muller quotes, 8:2, comes at the very beginning of the discussion (spread over chapters 8 and 9) of the heavenly sacrifice and is introductory in nature. While verse 2 does not yet mention the sacrifice itself, it states the location of the "real sanctuary" (namely, in heaven) and if Muller had fully understood what follows, he would realize that this location will be identified by the writer as the scene of the sacrifice—as *he describes that sacrifice*. Muller is guilty (as so many are) of bringing Gospel preconceptions into the text, when he notes: "I do not see any mention of execution, cross or altar in these two verses." If he has not understood that the "sacrifice" for this writer is *not* related to execution and cross, but is the act of Christ bringing his blood into the inner sanctuary and offering it to God, he will never understand what Hebrews is all about. He will also fail to understand the Platonic parallel explicit in these two chapters, in that a comparison is being set up between heaven and earth, between the heavenly ("real" in a Platonic sense) sanctuary and the earthly one, between the actions of Jesus the High Priest in heaven and the actions of the High Priest on earth. If the sacrifice by Jesus were in terms of execution and cross (whether located on earth or in heaven), there would be no basis for comparison. It is the parallel actions of the two High Priests that are being compared, not in terms of execution or killing, but in the ritual procedure of bringing the blood of the sacrifice into the inner tabernacle for offering to God. Jesus does this in the heavenly sanctuary, the Jewish High Priest does it in the earthly one. There may be other elements to the whole process taking place prior to this dual central act, such as Jesus' death/execution and the actual slaughter of the animal in the outer part of the Temple, but they are not introduced by the writer in these chapters. His focus is entirely on the action of bringing the blood into the sanctuary and offering it to God; indeed his language renders this act alone as his definition of Christ's "sacrifice."

With this proper understanding (and I will illustrate it further by appeal to other verses as we go along), one can see that the "sacrifice" which this writer envisions cannot take place anywhere but in heaven. He is hardly saying that Christ brought his own blood into the sanctuary of the temple on earth. Throughout chapters 8 and 9 he is comparing the two acts in the two sanctuaries by the two High Priests, heavenly and earthly. His whole point is that the heavenly one is superior, and that it supplants the earthly one. The "old covenant" is being replaced by a new one (8:7-13). In this, Hebrews shares a general motif found in many Christian expressions of the early period, that Christ's sacrifice, wherever it might be located, has introduced a new era in

which old practices are made obsolete and need to be set aside, such as the Temple cult and even the very Law itself. But this particular writer (and he is part of a community which has already adopted such an outlook) has his own special 'take' on the supplanting process; no other surviving document makes such a comparison between the heavenly and earthly Temples or places such exclusive focus on Christ's sacrifice as his act of bringing the blood into the heavenly sanctuary. Commentators often express surprise at this unique approach to christology, wondering "where it could have come from," but they fail to see that this is simply another indicator of the variety of independent development on the Christ-belief scene of the first century, none of it derived from a single point and doctrine of origin (no Big Bang), nothing to constitute a strange "deviation" from an established norm. That the source of this particular interpretation is entirely from scripture, the author makes abundantly clear throughout the whole document.

Because the two "sacrifices" by the two High Priests are located in two different realms, one in heaven the other on earth, we can now see the full import of the verse that comes up almost immediately, 8:4, that "smoking gun" I have often called attention to and which commentators regularly pussyfoot around: "*Now if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest, since there are already priests who offer the gifts which the Law prescribes, [adding the first part of verse 5:] though they minister in a sanctuary which is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly.*" [NEB translation] Verse 5 is another indicator of the Platonic viewpoint which saturates Hebrews. Why would the writer say this unless he is locating the sacrifice of the heavenly High Priest (Christ) in the heavenly temple, indicating its superior status—which is the whole point of the epistle? To go back to verse 4 itself, the dichotomy has to be seen as consistent, that is, that the temple High Priest exists and acts on earth, while the heavenly High Priest exists and acts in heaven. (The issue of the exact translation of 8:4 I cover in my book and in my website article on Hebrews—see link below—and will not repeat here.) Here we can see that if this writer's Christ *had* been on earth at all, this would have presented a big difficulty for his Platonic picture of the parallel between the two High Priests. If any of Christ's redeeming act had taken place on earth (and how could Calvary *not* be introduced into the picture?), the purity and 'lesson' of his whole exercise would have been compromised, and at the very least would have required clarification. As it is, the writer betrays no hint that anything disturbs his finely drawn contrast between earth and heaven.

As for *alēthinēs*, Carrier is of course correct that it can equally be translated as "true" or "real." My translation, "in the real sanctuary, the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man," was taken from the NEB, which is a translation I consistently gravitate to, as it attempts to convey the inherent, common sense meaning of a passage rather than simply adhering to the literal—although I sometimes find it guilty of reading Gospel associations into certain texts. Here, it is not off the mark (and it illustrates my point about the NEB), since there is hardly a distinction required in this verse between "sanctuary" and "tent," ("holy places" and "tabernacle" are the words used by Muller and Carrier), and thus "real" can, and should, be applied equally to the word sanctuary. "Tent," grammatically speaking, is simply in apposition to "sanctuary." Essentially, the writer is using both words to refer to the same thing. The only other translation I have seen which uses the word "real" instead of "true" is the Canadian Bible Society's *Good News for Modern Man*, though I doubt that they have done so with Platonic implications in mind. On the other hand, Spiros Zodhiates, in his *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, (p.122) does recognize the Platonic implications: "*skēnē alēthinē* (tabernacle) means the heavenly temple, after the model of which the Jews regarded the temple of Jerusalem as built (Heb. 8:2)." Other commentators (whom I will have occasion to mention later), have fully recognized Hebrews' Platonic basis.

Thus, contrary to Carrier, this translation is not misleading, and it *is* relevant to the location of

the sacrifice. Both terms refer to the heavenly temple, and that is where the writer will go on to locate Christ's own sacrifice as heavenly High Priest. (Note that the NEB's "tent" as translating *skēnēs*—which is its basic, original meaning since the primitive Hebrew sanctuary for the Ark of the Covenant was a portable tent—is right on the money. The earthly side of the comparison between the two sanctuaries is not in terms of the Temple in Jerusalem, but rather the "tent" version supposedly set up in Sinai during the Exodus, another indicator that the writer is thoroughly immersed in scripture rather than history or current reality.)

Let's also note 'Hagion' does not necessarily mean "sanctuary" (which can be understood as "temple"!).

But the context is undeniable. Hebrews engages lengthy comparisons between Jesus and the earthly High Priest—there can therefore be no doubt that the Temple is meant here (the use of tabernacle confirms the point). See also below.

Furthermore, sacrifices in the old Jewish system took place always **Outside** any tabernacle.

No, they took place inside it: Hebrews 9:6-8. There is an outer and an inner tabernacle. The sacrifice takes place in the outer and the blood is taken to the inner, where it must be poured on the altar. Only the High Priest can enter the inner tabernacle. See 9:11-21 for how this relates not only to 8:1-2 but to Doherty's entire thesis of parallels in heaven for earthly things, and, incidentally, for the fact that the sacrifice takes place there.

The NEB also helps the clarity in another verse which clearly illustrates that the sanctuary is a heavenly one, 9:11: "*But now Christ has come, high priest of good things already in being. The tent of his priesthood is a greater and more perfect one, not made by men's hands, that is, not belonging to this created world.*" What more could anyone want to demonstrate the location of the sacrifice? Christ as High Priest performing his sacrifice—the duties of his "priesthood" in "greater and more perfect" parallel (and contrast) to the earthly duties of the earthly High Priest—does so in the tent that does not belong to this created world. What more could anyone need to demonstrate the Platonic nature of the thought of this writer?

I do not see here (or **In The Whole Of 'Hebrews'!**) a "sacrifice" occurring in heaven (at the right hand of God!). And there is no mention of execution, cross or altar in these two verses.

The blood of the Lamb must be sprinkled on the altar. All readers would have *known* that—they didn't need to be told. Hebrews 9 definitely says Christ's blood was sprinkled on the Heavenly Altar. That certainly implies he was sacrificed in the Heavenly Outer Tabernacle. See Hebrews 9:23-24 - Christ is the "better sacrifice" who cleanses the "copy" in heaven of the altar on earth [*Carrier's phrasing here is misleading: the heavenly altar is not the copy of the one on earth, but vice-versa*], who did not enter the earthly tabernacle but the heavenly one. Indeed, Hebrews 10 struggles to argue from chapter 9 that this is the very reason why Christ only had to be sacrificed once: because, being heavenly, and performed on the *true* altar, it is permanent, unlike the earthly sacrifices. After all, the "better versions" of things are always in Heaven. That is made clear throughout Hebrews, and of course by 8:1-2, which is why Doherty cites it (but also see 9:11).

Again, Muller is wrong. But Doherty can't prove that this was not mapped onto an earthly counterpart. Yes, there is a heavenly sacrifice, but maybe that only paralleled a real one on earth. I don't see any way to decide one way or the other....

The way to decide is not to bring preconceptions from other circles and documents into one's analysis of this one, especially when this one evinces christology and soteriology which is

clearly quite different from those other circles and documents. Besides, in this case, that "mapping" would not work at all. A "real (sacrifice) on earth" would hardly be envisioned in terms of the entry into the sanctuary. First of all, 8:4 rejects that: Jesus would not "even have been a priest if he were/had been on earth." Second, any sacrifice on earth would have to be seen as involving the crucifixion itself, and so the elaborate Platonic parallel with the earthly High Priest's actions would not be applicable. A bloody death on Calvary would not cleanse the heavenly sanctuary (9:23), since the act of cleansing is in the application of the blood to the premises itself. If the writer *were* trying to make such a connection, or to somehow parallel the historical event on Calvary with an entry into the tabernacle (earth or heaven), he would be required to *explain* it. He would have a complicating second 'parallel' to deal with, not just the one between the entries into the two tabernacles. No, Carrier's studied neutrality is unworkable here. He goes on:

I also have some problem with the fact that Jesus is supposedly killed in the firmament, yet the tabernacles should be in the 7th heaven. So there seems to be different conceptions of what happened to Jesus between Hebrews and the Ascension of Isaiah, and it might be a strain to combine them. That does not mean Doherty's thesis is fundamentally wrong—after all, Doherty argues that there were many different Heavenly Jesus movements, so we should not be surprised to find them developing different doctrines. But it does show what I have said all along: we are much more ignorant than either Doherty or Muller let on. We don't really know all we need to know to decide the question of whether there was a historical Jesus....

There is nothing in Hebrews to indicate what this author's particular view of the layers of heaven was, or of where precisely Jesus underwent death—although he does mention Jesus' passage "through the heavens." There is no specific mention of the firmament (though there is of a "cross" which I will touch on later). Carrier has answered his own query. In the mythicist viewpoint, there is no need to see a commonality of concept across the entire Christian (or 'proto-Christian') movement of the first century. It would be interesting to know something about the points of contact between the Hebrews community and any other ones, but that doesn't mean we don't know enough to make a deductive decision—if only on a balance of probability—about the question of Jesus' existence, at least where the Hebrews community is concerned.

But the (bringing of) "blood" is a sign the sacrifice happens **Before** the Son enters the "true" holy places, which, according to the following verse, is heaven itself:

Heb9:24 YLT "for **Not** into **Holy Places Made With Hands** did the **Christ Enter** -- figures of the true -- but into **The Heaven Itself, ...**"

Therefore Christ would have brought his "blood" (figuratively) **From Outside The Heavens:** "... who **Has Passed Through The Heavens**, Jesus the Son of God, ..." (Heb4:14 Darby).

On the other hand, I think Muller could be right that Jesus carries his blood up through all the heavens, and therefore Doherty should say that the sacrifice takes place in the firmament here, rather than in the outer tabernacle. But without the ability to interrogate the author of Hebrews, who can say?

I agree, who can say? In any case, I don't claim that the death takes place in the outer tabernacle. The author doesn't tell us, and while the 4:14 reference to a "Christ who has passed through the heavens" is not itself conclusive, it may indeed suggest a death in the firmament, especially since in 12:2 he says in passing that Christ "endured the cross," and I don't think even a celestial crucifixion, with its suffering by a deity, could be regarded as taking place in the 7th heaven. But again, I have to stress that the author does not fail to tell us where the "sacrifice" takes place. It takes place upon the entry with the blood into the inner tabernacle. That is his *definition* of the sacrifice. (Whether he would hedge and widen his net if we could actually confront him for clarification, who knows?) Thus Muller's statement immediately above, that the bringing of

blood is a sign that the sacrifice happens *before* the Son enters the sanctuary, is to ignore that definition. At least he seems to recognize that a key element of the process involves the entry into the *heavenly* sanctuary, but I wonder how "figurative" blood would cleanse those "real" premises.

According to the above, "... passed through the heavens ..." (Heb4:14) would require earth as the starting point!...the counterpart of Doherty's "higher world" (the heavens) is earth itself. No other "world" is mentioned (1:10, 12:26).

Muller should certainly know better. As he himself suggests, the firmament, air, earth, and Sheol are all one world (this world) and Hebrews uses the plural "heavens" for a reason (there are many, and they are indeed distinct from "this world")....

I'm not sure what point Muller thinks he is making. Quite apart from Carrier's observation, the counterpart of the "higher world" is indeed earth itself. This is the Platonic dichotomy the writer is presenting in regard to the parallel sacrifices the two High Priests are making, Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, the earthly High Priest in the earthly one.

c) right after 12:2, where Jesus **Endured** the cross, the next verse exhorts: "For consider well **Him Who Endured** so great **Contradiction From Sinners Against Himself** ..." (12:3 Darby). Where were these "sinners" opposing Jesus? Considering Heb7:25-26 NASB, "... He [Jesus] always lives to make intercession for them [Christians], ... a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, **Separated From Sinners** ...", the sinners are not in the highest heaven! And sins are never suggested to be committed by demonic powers, those later ones not even acknowledged in the epistle, except for one reference to the devil (singular!): Heb2:14. Instead, sins concern earthly humans.

...The sinners can be the demons or their counterparts and agents on earth.

In fact, there is a third alternative: that the passage is traditionally mistranslated. Usually it is rendered something like: "Consider him who has endured hostility against himself from sinners..." From my "Sound of Silence" feature, I'll reproduce a couple of paragraphs on this verse:

Here, more than one scholar has pointed out the similarity of language and thought to the episode in Numbers 16:38 (LXX). There, Core, Dathan and Abiron have rebelled against Moses and his claim to speak for the Lord, with the result that they all perish in the abyss that opens up beneath their feet. The Lord then directs Moses to sanctify the censers of "these sinners against their own souls" (*tôn hamartôlôn toutôn en tais psuchais autôn*). The point is, they are sinners 'against themselves.' When we turn to the Hebrews passage, we find a similar phrase, now in the form of "sinners against himself," the latter referring to Christ. But this final word shows variants between manuscripts. Does the parallel in Numbers indicate that the original reading was "sinners against themselves"? Hugh Montefiore (*Hebrews*, p.216) accepts such a reading. Does the meaning entail the idea that Jesus is enduring hostility *for* sinners in general, that is, for their sake, not that the sinners are the ones being hostile to him, as in the Gospel portrayal? (This is Jean Héring's translation, *Hebrews*, p.109.) Jesus 'enduring hostility' may encompass no more than the (mythological) concept that he suffered and died.

Alternatively, if Jesus is said to have endured hostility—or rebellion, if the thought is a conscious parallel to the use of the word in Numbers—on the part of sinners, meaning that he suffered in order to redeem rebellious sinners (whether sinners against himself or against themselves), the whole idea may have been introduced in order to make a comparison to the believers in what the writer now urges upon them. Verse 4 goes on to say: "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." Just as Jesus suffered

on account of sin, this too is the experience of believers, though their sufferings have not gone as far as his. But they too should endure, just like Jesus. The writer rounds out his little homily by offering words of encouragement. Where are they taken from? Not from any voice of Jesus on earth, but once more from scripture, in Proverbs 3:11-12, a reference to God disciplining his sons.

Muller calls attention to the reference to "sinners" in 7:26: "*For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.*" This statement seems to imply quite the opposite of what Muller would have: that Jesus was never in contact with sinners, being someone who is exalted in the heavens. The sinners were indeed "separated" from him.

Further on, Doherty declares "He [the author of 'Hebrews'] has said that **Christ's Sacrifice Is "Spiritual, Eternal and unblemished" (9:14)**". If the sacrifice is spiritual & eternal, it has to be mythical, isn't it? But first, let's check the verse:

Heb9:14 Darby "how much rather shall **The Blood Of The Christ**, who by the **Eternal Spirit** offered himself spotless to God, purify your conscience from dead works to worship [the] living God?"

Where is the spiritual & eternal sacrifice?...

Again, I think Muller misunderstands Doherty, though Doherty is certainly confusing here. I believe Doherty is not saying the sacrifice is cyclicly repeated like other myths (e.g. Osiris) but that its effect lasts forever....

And further to this exchange:

The spirit is eternal, not the sacrifice. And the later is not qualified as spiritual. And no translation can possibly have the sacrifice as "spiritual, eternal, ...", according to the Greek. If there is no evidence supporting your case, that's not a reason to create some!

I agree. This is not the only place where Doherty is a little muddled. Though his point has merit, he does not always make the best argument for his own case—or perhaps sometimes misuses evidence. This is a good example of that. The context does support Doherty, not Muller. But Doherty is wrong to claim that Heb. 9:14 literally says what Doherty claims.

Well, I hope to demonstrate that I am neither muddled nor misusing evidence, much less "creating" it. Once again, my "spiritual and eternal sacrifice" is a drawing on of an actual translation, namely the NEB (and I should have noted the source in my text). By the time I decided to quote that one, I had read a lot of commentaries on Hebrews, and I came to the conclusion that the NEB had cut to the heart of the meaning, even if it was not a literal translation (much like the example I dealt with above). The NEB says:

9:14. How much greater [than the blood of goats and bulls] is the power of the blood of Christ; he offered himself without blemish to God, a spiritual and eternal sacrifice....

Some of the older commentators on Hebrews (before more recent scholars began to shy away from such insights, perhaps realizing their danger) fully recognized the Platonic nature of the epistle writer's thought. James Moffat, in the *International Critical Commentary* (1924) says (p.xliii, and I'll quote him at some length as there are several features here pertinent to our discussion):

"When the author writes that Christ 'in the spirit of the eternal' (9:14) offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice to God, he has in mind the contrast between the annual sacrifice on the day of atonement and the sacrifice of Christ which never needed to be repeated, because it had

been offered in the spirit and—as we might say—in *the eternal order of things* [my emphasis]. It was a sacrifice bound up with his death in history, but it belonged essentially to *the higher order of absolute reality*. The writer breathed the Philonic atmosphere in which the eternal Now overshadowed the things of space and time, but he knew this sacrifice had taken place on the cross, and his problem was one which never confronted Philo, the problem which we moderns have to face in the question: How can a single historical fact possess a timeless significance?"

The first thing one notices, of course, is that Moffat takes a Platonic meaning from the text itself but imposes the historical dimension which is *not* taken from the text, but is rather read into it. Of course, every commentator does this. It is amusing that Moffat, here and further on in his Introduction, has to admit that the "problems" inherent in the text relate to issues surrounding the incarnation and presumed historical event: "[H]ow is the Sonship compatible with the earthly life?—these are problems which remain unsolved" (p.xlix); and: "he [the author of the epistle] does not succeed in harmonizing its implications about the incarnate life with his *gnōsis* of the eternal Son within the higher sphere of divine realities" (p.l). No wonder the author fails to solve these "problems"! He never addresses them. He never shows a sign that they exist for him. They are problems created by the imposition of the Gospel Jesus on documents which don't know of any such figure. In that last phrase just quoted, "his *gnōsis* of the eternal Son within the higher sphere of divine realities," Moffat inadvertently demonstrates the sum total of the writer's knowledge, the sole basis of his faith and christology: it is the product of revealed *gnōsis* about a Son who existed in that higher realm of "reality." Once we see and admit that, the entire epistle and all its elements fall into place.

Moffat has also touched (in the long quote above) on the point of the "once" of Jesus' sacrifice, as does Carrier:

... There is no doubt that Hebrews said it only happened once, and that it happened in history, a good long time after the first covenant was established, and prior to our own time in history, and that its effect is eternal. If Doherty thinks otherwise, I don't see why he needs to. His thesis is perfectly compatible with a once and past event. After all, Satan's fall was a once and past event, yet clearly not something that happened on earth. And Jesus' sacrifice is precisely what was necessitated by Satan's fall, so we should expect standard notions of sympathetic magic here: the cure must resemble the disease (a common notion in ancient medicine). Thus, if Satan fell only to the *aer*, not to become anyone on earth, you would expect that is where Jesus must go, too. That, again, does not prove this was so, but it shows the plausibility inherent in Doherty's thesis.

I suppose I must thank Carrier for regularly providing indications that my view is the correct or logical one, even though he regularly takes a cautionary step back to agnosticism. Carrier claims that there is no doubt Hebrews says that the sacrifice "happened in history." This, of course, is the crux of the matter, and I will devote some space to demonstrating why this is wrong, and how the document tells us so. First, the simple answer is that the sacrifice is "once" because its perfect, eternal nature requires only a single performance (and because it was performed 'in the spirit,' as Moffat puts it); but this eternal sacrifice was not *performed* in history, rather it was *revealed* in history, in the present time. The latter point is a motif we find throughout the other New Testament epistles. Paul, pseudo-Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John: they all say that Christ has been "manifested/revealed" in the present time, after a long period of being hidden, that the present time is a time of "the arrival of faith," that apostles have been inspired by "the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven," that the Son of God "is come and given us understanding," that the Son speaks to us through holy scripture, and so on.

Before looking at the key passage (9:24-26), let's glance back to an earlier one which introduces the idea of "once": (7:27) "*He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first*

for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself." (RSV). If the reader will recall the argument earlier, this act of "offering" is not the death on a cross (wherever it might have taken place), but the entry of Jesus into the heavenly sanctuary and the *offering* of his blood on the altar to God. This must be, since (as we see here in 7:27) it constitutes the parallel comparison between the action of the high priest on earth and that of Jesus. The *only* point of comparison presented is the entry into the tabernacle. Therefore, the *offering* is the act in the heavenly sanctuary. This is the key to the understanding of this epistle, and if one insists on bringing Gospel preconceptions to the document, one will forever miss it.

That this "offering" takes place in heaven is demonstrated in a further passage, 10:11-12: "*And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God*" (RSV). There can be little doubt that the writer's horizon here is entirely confined to heaven. Immediately after Christ makes his offering, he sits at God's side. There is no intervening resurrection, no ascension through the heavens (even from the firmament). At the very least, even if such elements cannot be necessarily ruled out as prior happenings, the definition of the *offering* itself must be confined to a heavenly event, the entry into the heavenly sanctuary. The "offering" is the same thing as the "sacrifice." Understanding what the author has in mind by the act of offering, where it is located, is part of the key, as we shall see.

The main reason why the author has styled the 'event' of Christ's sacrifice as "once for all" is not because it happened in history, but because he is contrasting it with the performance of the high priest's duties on earth. Here and in several other passages (e.g. 9:12, 9:25) he makes a point of noting that the temple priests perform their sacrifices repeatedly; however, Christ has to do this but "once" only, because his blood, his sacrifice, is superior, perfect; his blood has "greater power" (9:14) than the blood of goats and bulls. His sacrifice need be performed only once, and it has eternal efficacy. That translation Muller disputed, "a spiritual and eternal sacrifice," comes immediately after this thought in 9:14, and thus the NEB's attachment of "eternal" to "sacrifice" is justified: it is fully in keeping with the writers "once for all" declaration, because the sacrifice itself is eternal, both in its Platonic performance and in its effects. As at other points and in other contexts in the epistle, the writer is at pains to demonstrate how Christ as High Priest is the superior element, thus supplanting the old systems and readings of scripture. All sects believe they have uncovered the correct, newly inspired interpretation of the truth.

Now we can go on to the key passage, 9:24-26, and again I'll use the RSV: "24. *For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear [the verb *emphanidzō*] in the presence of God on our behalf. 25. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; 26. for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared [the verb *phaneroō*] once for all at the completion of the ages to abolish sin by his sacrifice.*

With the proper understanding of the writer's concept of sacrifice and offering and where it is located, we can see all the elements of this epistle's thought in the above three verses. There can be no doubt that Christ "enters" a heavenly sanctuary, of which the one on earth is a Platonic copy, and the "appearing before God" is this heavenly entry to offer his blood ("on our behalf"). Most important is what this does for verse 26, that central verse which Carrier and others use to interpret an historical venue for Jesus' sacrifice, taking "appeared...at the completion of the ages" as a reference to Jesus' incarnation in recent history. But it is not. The act of "appearing" throughout these verses relates to one thing: Jesus' sacrifice, which is synonymous with his entry into the heavenly sanctuary to make his offering to God. The "appearing" in verse 26b is not some sudden shift to a general reference to Christ's birth or life on earth, something which is

never touched on when discussing the sacrifice (or indeed at any other point in the epistle). The "appearing to abolish sin" of the latter verse is in the same category as the "appearing before God" of the earlier verse 24 (the two verses use verbs that have similar meanings). All of it takes place in heaven.

And the verb "appeared" in verse 26: "*Phaneroō*" is strictly a 'revelation' word, in keeping with the standard sort of expression found throughout the epistles when they speak of Christ in the present time: not coming to earth or living a life, but being revealed. To this idea he has attached his phrase "once," which here may not be the same prime fit as in all the other cases, in that elsewhere it is the sacrifice which is performed "once for all," while here it is the revelation. But that this is an anomaly must be accepted in any case, since its application is not to the sacrifice, no matter how one might interpret *phaneroō*. Perhaps he was led to apply "once" to the present-day revelation because of its singular and unprecedented nature. Few writers are always perfectly consistent in their use of language.

Let's also look at the first part of verse 26, whose significance is usually overlooked in discussing the passage: "*for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.*" That this thought could only be applied to heaven should be evident. The concept of dying repeatedly on earth throughout history would have been nonsensical, and he would hardly have introduced it. To style it as repeating "*since the foundation of the world*" places it in a mythological setting. What he is saying is that Christ would not have to undergo his redeeming act on a regular basis *in the spiritual realm*. Perhaps he is consciously repudiating the more pagan concept of a savior god's "repetition" of his act of dying and rising—the "always is so," something timeless and constant (à la Plutarch's interpretation of the Osiris myth and Sallustius' similar reading of savior god mythology, all of it ultimately based on the agricultural / astronomical cycle). But the inclusion of the word "suffer" in this sentence indicates that for this writer the entire scope of Christ's actions, the entire redeeming process which has abolished sin, has taken place in the heavenly world—even the death itself (the "on the cross" of 12:2).

And we can go further. That the writer does not have any earthly event in mind in this entire passage is indicated by the verse coming shortly after. 28a says: "So Christ was *offered* once to remove men's sins..." We have identified the idea of "offering" as attached to the entry of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary to offer his blood to God. The "once" is back where it belongs. But 28a is also a virtual restatement of 26b: "*he has appeared once for all at the completion of the ages to abolish sin by his sacrifice.*" The removal or abolition of sin is tied in the latter to the act of sacrifice and in the former to the act of offering. But these are synonymous, for the act of offering *is* the act of sacrifice. Thus the reference to "appearing" (being revealed) at the completion of the ages is further demonstrated to be a reference to the *heavenly* event. Nowhere is anything earthly in view.

This passage happens to lead into the one reference (verse 28b) in all the epistles which many claim implies that Christ is "returning" to earth, that he will be coming a "second time" to bring salvation (referring to the Parousia). But the "second time" word can also mean "next," removing any thought of a return. I discuss this in the Epilogue of my article on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and I recommend that the reader investigate the whole of this article for a fuller discussion of the arguments made here, and other aspects of the epistle which demonstrate a lack of knowledge of an historical Jesus or an event of salvation on earth.

Muller and Carrier conclude their attention to Hebrews:

In conclusion, there is no evidence in 'Hebrews' the "sacrifice" happened in the heavens, despite Doherty's best imaginative effort & rhetoric. But there are significant clues pointing to earth....

Neither is true. There is *some* evidence for heaven, but it is vague. And the clues that point to "earth" actually only point to the whole sublunar realm. Thus, the case remains undecided. Doherty's thesis is neither challenged nor proved by Hebrews, taken in isolation.

I hope that the above discussion has demonstrated that both Muller and Carrier are wrong. A proper examination of Hebrews (one without the Gospel-colored glasses) amply demonstrates that the sacrifice—as the author sees and defines it—takes place in heaven. It is anything but "vague." Nor do I think that shifting the "clues that point to earth" to the sublunar realm is all that applicable here. Those earthly "clues" are largely part of the earthly dimension that forms one half of the author's Platonic parallel, although we certainly can conclude, if we read the implications behind the writer's cosmology, that the death of Jesus on the cross would indeed be relegated to the sublunar realm. This, however, is not where the writer places his focus, and it even seems to be an element which is unimportant to him.

The Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates, perhaps more than any other document, the necessity to remove Gospel preconceptions from one's mind before approaching it. Muller has shown that trying to impose historical paradigms on it leads to a host of difficulties and contradictions, whereas a mythicist viewpoint imposes only unity and consistency. That this writer and his community could create such a majestic soteriological structure, such a fantastic view of spiritual reality, entirely out of scripture and philosophical concepts, demonstrates the extent such forces and sheer imagination could play in the religious inventions of the era. (We need to carry this realization with us when we go to Paul; it will make it easier to see and accept that he, too, is presenting his view of spiritual reality, from a Son who is "of the seed of David" because scripture tells him so, to a crucifixion in the heavens at the hands of demon spirits, "the rulers of this age.") Once the picture the author of Hebrews is presenting is clearly seen, not only does everything fit into a largely Platonic conception within the religious philosophy of the time, one can see the great void that exists about anything concerning a Jesus on earth. And that void extends throughout the epistle. I'll be delving into the latter area in Part Three.

* * * * *

Muller included in his critique of The Jesus Puzzle some rebuttal to certain points made by Carrier in his review of The Jesus Puzzle for the Internet Infidels, and Carrier responded. I will be commenting on some of that material in Part Three. When Muller returns to The Jesus Puzzle in Part 2 of his critique, he revisits topics such as Romans 1:3, higher and lower worlds, and Hebrews in regard to my claims about the silence on an historical Jesus in that document. He also addresses "born of woman" in Galatians 4, "brother of the Lord" and Josephus. It is in Part Three that I will be bringing in 'fourth-party' comments from posters on the Internet Infidels.

Responses To Critiques Of The Mythicist Case

One:

Bernard Muller

(with contributions from Richard Carrier and others)

Part Three

*Romans 1:3 and Hebrews revisited; Galatians 4:4's "born of woman"
plus a bit of Josephus and "brother of the Lord"*

* * * * *

The third and final part of my response to Bernard Muller revisits topics covered in previous parts and deals as well with several new areas. Muller's critique of *The Jesus Puzzle* can be found in two parts at: http://www.geocities.com/b_d_muller/djp1.html and http://www.geocities.com/b_d_muller/djp2.html

Muller digressed from his assault on *The Jesus Puzzle* to address Carrier's own review of my book. By now, the abysmal nature of Muller's critique should be evident to the reader. But it will get worse. As Carrier writes: "...Muller only makes himself look like he doesn't know what he is talking about. Probably because he doesn't." Of course, anyone has the right to publish whatever criticism of my work he or she sees fit, and most of those criticisms are by apologetic-minded individuals whose confessional (or professional) interests are threatened. But Muller is one of a minority of critics for whom confessional interest plays no part. To date I have ignored him, but it is surprising how much attention his critique of *The Jesus Puzzle* has gained, and how many have been drawn into thinking that he has dealt a severe or mortal blow to the mythicist case, mine in particular. They say that a little learning is a dangerous thing, and so is a lot of ignorance. With enough ignorance, as Muller has demonstrated, one can criticize with an unlimited degree of unperturbed self-confidence. (This makes him particularly frustrating to deal with on discussion forums, as myself and others can attest to.) The unfortunate side effect is that those who are equally ignorant can be taken in, especially when it serves their own interests to be so. The manhandling of Muller by myself and Carrier (who is anything but a committed mythicist) is not motivated by *ad hominem* impulses; but if there is ever going to be a serious and professional consideration of the mythicist option, we have to neutralize and rid ourselves of the truly amateur, uninformed—and often transparently apologetic—voices clamoring to beat down the heretical notion that no Jesus existed. Ignorance tends to be their hallmark, and that hallmark extends even into the realms of academia, as another article on this website has shown. As incompetent as Muller's critique is, it unfortunately has to be dealt with.

Again, I will be quoting much of Muller's and Carrier's texts, as well as from postings on IIDB. I will mark hiatuses, and the odd insertion of my own will be in italics in square brackets. (Muller's text, with color scheme preserved, will be indented, while quotes from Carrier and the others will be in red, also indented. A separate Addendum will link to a review reprinted here of Muller's critique originally posted on IIDB.)

Critiquing Richard Carrier's Review of The Jesus Puzzle

Because Carrier, in his review of *The Jesus Puzzle*, supported me in my picture of upper and lower worlds and the activity of gods in the heavenly realms, Muller felt obliged to try to discredit Carrier's own reading of ancient cosmology, particularly where gods like Osiris are concerned.

Richard Carrier commented that in Plutarch's Isis and Osiris (written around 90-100), "it is there, in the "outermost areas" (the "outermost part of matter"), **That Evil Has Particular Dominion**, and where Osiris is continually dismembered and reassembled (375a-b)."

Let's check about these outermost areas and where Osiris was dismembered:

- "[s.38] The **Outmost Parts Of The Land Beside The Mountains And Bordering On The Sea** the Egyptians call **Nephthys**. ... Whenever, then, **The Nile** overflows and with abounding waters **Spreads Far Away** to those who dwell in **The Outermost Regions** ..."

....

It looks to me the outermost areas are regions around Egypt, called Nephthys, and the remains of Osiris are dispersed in Egypt.

Muller needs to actually read the whole book. Plutarch, first, gives several different schemes (historical, metaphysical, etc.) and explicitly distinguishes them as different, not the same thing—he even says the metaphysical is the correct one. Second, Plutarch clearly discusses the use of terms like Nephthys as allegorical. If Muller had actually read the text, he would know that Nephthys is not foremost a place—she is a goddess. She represents Finality and Victory (355f). Thus she can be attached allegorically to all sorts of things. The attachment of her name to the Outlands is one allegory—hence also the earth is called Isis and the air Horus and aspects of the Nile Osiris...Thus, Plutarch is not talking here about the heavenly Osiris, where he says he and Isis are intermediary gods between heaven and earth. Again, Plutarch relates several *different* interpretations of the myth. Muller seems to think they are all the same one. Only someone who did not read the whole book would make that mistake....

A) Plutarch Never Used the expression "**Sublunar Heaven**", nor did he mention any world/heaven below the moon and above the earth:

"[s.63] that part of the world which undergoes **Reproduction And Destruction** is contained **Underneath The Orb Of The Moon**, and all things in it are subjected to **Motion** and to **Change** through the four elements: **Fire, Earth, Water, And Air**."

This part of the world is just like earth and the air above it!

....

The ancients (as Aristotle and Ptolemy) thought the moon was the most outward (in the earth direction) celestial body. The sun was understood in an orbit beyond the one of the moon, among the planets moving between the moon and the firmament. And the "fixed" stars were on the firmament in front (or part) of "the prime mover sphere". In any case, the firmament was considered behind the moon and therefore not sublunar.

Muller is really confused here. The sublunar heaven is the firmament, which is indeed a part of everything below the moon...At any rate, his criticism is completely irrelevant to my actual point: that Osiris dies and rises in the *aer*. That it happens "often" means it cannot be a historical person Plutarch is talking about....

D) For Plutarch, the final resting place of Osiris is below the polluted earth, and Not Into The Heavens:

"[s.78] ... this god **Osiris Is The Ruler And King Of The Dead, Nor Is He Any Other Than The God** that among the Greeks is **Called Hades** and Pluto. But since it is not understood in with manner this is true, it greatly disturbs the majority of people who suspect that the holy and sacred Osiris truly dwells **In The Earth And Beneath The Earth, Where Are Hidden Away The Bodies** of those that are believed to have reached their end. But he himself is **Far Removed From The Earth** [downward!], uncontaminated and unpolluted and pure from all matter that is subject to destruction and death ..."

Oh dear no! Plutarch is chastising the "majority of people" for believing the wrong thing! Go

back and read the context. Thus, he is not saying that Osiris is really far below—but far above! He is saying that the people are *wrongly* disturbed by the idea he is below. Indeed, he could not say in one place that everything below the moon is subject to decay, and then say that below the earth everything is "uncontaminated and unpolluted and pure from all matter that is subject to destruction and death"! That would be a direct self-contradiction. *Only* the heavens ever qualify for the latter description (without exception in ancient literature). Further, the verb "far removed" means set apart from—so it cannot mean *in* the earth (and Plutarch certainly believed earth was a sphere, so anything below earth is literally *inside* earth).

The following discussion of bodies and souls also exactly matches that of the Axiochus and of Philo, and thus clearly repeats the Middle-Platonic view of two levels of the cosmos (which I will note again: ALL SCHOLARS OF ANCIENT COSMOLOGY AGREE IS A FACT)....

E) Plutarch is however very much confusing when handling different concepts & traditions, some of them mythical, and lacks consistency through his rather incoherent narration.

I suggest that Muller has misplaced the "confusion" and "incoherence." It belongs a little closer to home.

2.9. Conclusion:

I do admire Earl's rhetorical skills but I rely on the evidence first. And from ancient pagan writings before Julian's times (331-363), there is no testimony presented in 'the Jesus Puzzle' about the concept of an upper world between heaven & earth, where the fleshy meets demonic powers, a place where Jesus would have been crucified. After years of research, Doherty was unable to flesh out the evidence for it...Furthermore, all the texts cited by Doherty (and Carrier) were not written before Paul's times. Why would the early Christians imagine an upper world as more real & pungent than their earthly one?

With these remarks, Muller demonstrates the full extent of his ignorance, and his basic reliance on the argument from personal incredulity. He himself cannot imagine such a view of an upper world, and he is so uninformed about Middle Platonic philosophy—indeed, the central philosophy of the entire era—that he does not realize that this is precisely the way the ancients viewed the spiritual versus the earthly parts of their universe. The upper world was indeed "more real and pungent" than the one they moved in, as divorced from reality as that may have been. Incidentally, though the outlook is not the same (since cosmological views of the universe are now much different and our scientific knowledge vastly superior), Muller overlooks a close parallel among modern believers. We might ask the question, how can today's Christians—and religious believers generally—imagine an upper world (Heaven) more primary, important and eternal than the world they experience in their earthly lives, the only lives we can be certain of? There is no more concrete evidence today for the existence of Heaven than the ancients had for their own view of a layered world of the spirit above the earth. In both cases, it has been entirely the product of the mind. In ancient times, philosophers had very little else to go on but their own intellects, and unfortunately, they brought too many unsubstantiated assumptions and cockeyed axioms to the exercise of those intellects. Today, we ought to know better.

Muller's remarks do not deserve the polite explanation Carrier provides, as though anyone who purports to study the rise of Christianity and its philosophical context in contemporary culture should need to have such an answer provided. At this particular point, we are first and foremost concerned not with whether Paul or any other early Christian placed Jesus' death in the upper world, but rather with the most basic outlook on reality that had been developing for centuries

before Paul came along. Without knowledge of the latter, we can never arrive at an accurate judgment of the former. As Carrier puts it:

This is explained by Middle Platonic (and Jewish) writers: this world was subject to change, decay, chaos, and seemed to cause all manner of evil: God is good and created everything; therefore there must be a superior, perfect world not subject to change, decay, chaos, and evil; and that must be the heavens (the only thing left, and the only thing that seems not subject to change, decay, chaos or evil—besides, elevation is a universal human notion of superiority: no culture has ever imagined a "better" world below the earth, all have imagined it *above*).

One can see how unsubstantiated axioms so misled the ancient intellect. Change, decay (which is really a step in the ongoing course of evolution and 'rebirth') was axiomatically judged as inferior and undesirable. If an all-high God existed (and few could conceive otherwise) he must be impervious to such things and transcendent from them. Then the universe had to be structured to give him a place to live, intermediaries between himself and the world had to be established, explanations for the world's evil and its separation from the imagined perfection of the spiritual realm invented, until a vast and unwieldy superstructure was erected which few philosophers could free themselves from, none of which bore any relation to reality. Out of that milieu grew Christianity, and it is only with a knowledge of that cosmology that Christianity can be understood (as well as evaluated). Muller asks:

*Why did Paul never state Jesus' death in an upper world/lower heaven?
Why did he never specify the crucifixion was not on earth, more so when many were crucified there?*

Actually, Paul did state it, in an indirect way. If the crucifixion *had* been on earth, if the event was remembered by people still alive, some of whom had been Jesus' followers with whom Paul was still in contact, why would Paul state that Jesus' death was a matter of *faith*? In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, he says: "We believe that Jesus died and rose again..." The place of crucifixion in Colossians 2:15 looks like demon territory. In Romans 10:9, he says: "If you believe that God raised (Jesus) from the dead..." Why is there an appeal to faith here? Couldn't Paul draw on the witness of many that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead? In 1 Corinthians 15:12-15, he rhetorically allows for the possibility that Jesus was not raised if the human dead are not raised, and that they have all been deceived by God. This sounds like a gospel message dependent solely on revelation from God himself. The so-called "appearances" in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 look like visions, both in their language and because of Paul's inclusion of his own vision in the list without any differentiation (he does the same in 9:1). Paul never points to historical facts or traditions to justify faith in Jesus' dying and rising, nor for describing anything else about his divine Son of God, including the manner and agency of his crucifixion (the "rulers of this age" of 1 Corinthians 2:8). If there is such a void on historical time, place and agents in regard to Jesus' redeeming act, where else can he place this 'event' except outside earth and history?

Carrier presents a little different twist on Paul's silence:

If his audience already knew, why would he say? After all, he only ever writes to people who had already been orally evangelized. Thus, most of the fundamentals of doctrine were already in place.

But those "fundamentals" were in place on a much broader scale than any earlier evangelizing by Paul. They were virtually a given in the philosophical and religious atmosphere of the time. The deaths of the Hellenistic savior gods took place not on earth or in history; they inhabited mythical settings. Philosophers had already created the upper dimension where divine

intermediaries revealed and rescued. Paul did not need to explain to his prospective converts that Jesus had died in the spiritual world. Nor would anyone likely have questioned it. It was part of the natural order of things, and no more needed or invited explanation than did the concept of animal sacrifice to God and the gods as practiced in Jewish and pagan religion. Nowhere in the Old or New Testament does anyone explain how blood sacrifice operates to do what it supposedly did, not even in the epistle to the Hebrews where these processes are stated but not justified or elucidated. Today, do evangelists and preachers explain the "soul" to their audiences, despite referring to it ad nauseum?

As Carrier points out, Paul, when faced with the Corinthians' doubt about human resurrection, does engage (1 Corinthians 15:35-54) "in an elaborate explanation of how there are two worlds, one of decay one of indecay, the former was earth and the latter heaven, and the resurrected get bodies in the latter." This, however, is not to explain the principle of upper and lower worlds or the place of Jesus' activity, but to convince the Corinthians that the process is feasible, no doubt because they could not envision their own rotted and disintegrated corpses rematerializing to new life. Paul addresses their doubt by conceding that flesh and blood are indeed incapable of entering the kingdom of Heaven, but that humans will be converted into new, spiritual bodies. What Carrier and most others fail to recognize in this passage is that, while the prototype for this new body is Christ's own, the latter is identified from start to finish as a spiritual body, resident of heaven, made of heavenly material, with a total silence on it ever having been other than such, on it ever having progressed from physical to spiritual—despite the universal reading of such a progression into the background. It cannot be there because that feature would not only contradict what Paul actually says, it would ruin the whole picture and structure of Paul's argument. Carrier, in fact, falls into that universal trap by reading such a thing into Paul's words: "...and the resurrected get bodies in the latter [heaven]...as Jesus must have, too." I recommend a reading of my Supplementary Article No. 8: Christ as "Man": Does Paul Speak of Jesus as an Historical Person?

Carrier goes on to say:

Since no one ever seems to have doubted the death of Jesus (even the Corinthian faction did not deny that *Jesus* had been resurrected, only that we would be), there was never an occasion for Paul to elaborate on where Jesus died (as we can suppose Paul would have if he had to prove Jesus had died—as it is, he simply says it is proven by scripture, as if his audience already agrees).

I must disagree with most of this. As I have pointed out, more than one passage indicates that "faith" is required to accept both the death and resurrection of Jesus, and there is evidence in 1 Corinthians that indeed some Corinthians denied that (the spiritual) Jesus had even been crucified. The issue between the factions at Corinth which Paul is addressing in the first four chapters is focused on the *fact* of "Christ crucified," the conflict between Paul's gospel (the wisdom of God) and that of his rivals (the wisdom of the world). I have argued that we must see Apollos at Corinth as included in that latter group, meaning that there were Christian missionaries who denied the fact of Jesus' death, and apparently preached him only as a Revealer Christ, saving through knowledge which confers perfection and present 'resurrection.' See my Supplementary Article No. 1: Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate.

Carrier is somewhat contradictory in his final statement above. If there was no necessity to demonstrate that Jesus had died, presumably because everyone knew and accepted it, why would Paul even bother to "prove it by scripture"? What is the significance of his "*kata tas graphas*" in 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4? The standard interpretation is that he is saying Jesus' death and rising *fulfilled* scripture, but this is an idea he develops nowhere else, despite his fixation on the sacred

writings. I have suggested that the phrase means "according to the scriptures" in the sense of scripture *telling* us these 'facts'. Thus, scripture is the *source* of Paul's information about the Christ, not historical tradition. In fact, Paul declares in Galatians 1:11-12 that he got his gospel solely through revelation. That is why faith is needed for believers to accept both the death and the rising.

And because of the flimsy substantiation of "Doherty's world" in all of the ancient literature (four centuries of it!), wouldn't that raise a major (controversial!) issue after being learned from Paul (or others) as where Jesus suffered the cross & died (and out of sight from humans!)? Of course it would! Then why don't we observe the apostle dealing with it in his epistles, where he just did that with many others?

Both Carrier and myself have demonstrated that the substantiation of "Doherty's world" is anything but flimsy in ancient literature. If it was a given in the background of most religious thought of the time, for Paul to provide some statement or explanation of it would have been superfluous. With that in mind, we might consider the significance of Ignatius' repeated insistence on the 'fact' that Jesus had been born of Mary and crucified by Pontius Pilate. If these were well-known facts in the background (and how could they not be?), what reason would Ignatius have had for insisting on them? How could some Christian missionaries be going about *not* preaching such a Christ, as he says? The answer is that Ignatius was *not* stating long-known historical details but rather new developments in the evolution of the mythical Christ into the historical Jesus, and not everyone agreed with it. (I have argued elsewhere that Ignatius cannot simply be countering docetic doctrines about an historical Jesus.)

For me, Doherty's theory crashes to the ground right there, because of lack of external testimonies about the mythical lower heaven and the silences of Paul (& 'Hebrews') about it. Actually, and looking only at Paul's (seven) authentic epistles (both Earl & myself agree on those) and 'Hebrews', the evidence is much stronger towards earth and Zion (Jerusalem) than for the firmament or that mysterious "world".

Competent historians read documents in context: that means, understanding what Paul and his readers would have taken for granted. The fact that demons resided in the *aer* is one of those facts—as again: ALL SCHOLARS WHO STUDY THIS SUBJECT AGREE.

Now, it is correct that this does not prove Doherty's case. Even though Paul surely believed in a firmament and *aer* that resides between earth and the moon (the border of the 1st heaven), and surely believed demons lived there, it does not follow that this is where he imagined the passion as taking place...

No, but it sure helps. Without that knowledge of Paul's "sure" beliefs, we haven't a chance of properly interpreting passages like 1 Corinthians 2:8.

...That is only **consistent** with what Paul says—which Doherty is right to note is a bit curious: you would think Paul would have said something more concrete about the life and times of Jesus. Surely, his congregations would be asking him things about the real Jesus all the time, so there is indeed a problem for historicists to explain why none of his letters ever answer any such questions or even hint at their existence. Now, one might come up with theories to explain this. But those theories will all be at least as ad hoc as anything in Doherty's thesis. Two ad hoc theories? I see no way to decide between them.

What makes an "ad hoc theory"? Technically, what makes something "ad hoc" is a specific relationship to the purpose for which the 'ad hoc' thing has been formulated, and it is sometimes

given the derogatory implication of being slanted to serve that purpose, that it only has application in regard to the specific end in mind. When we use it in this field, it is often implied that each 'ad hoc' explanation is isolated, a kind of desperate measure to come up with some explanation, that each one doesn't form a good fit or a good combination with other ad hoc explanations on other points. I don't know if Carrier has all this negative implication in mind here, but let's assume he does (it certainly fits his stated situation regarding historicist explanations of Paul's silence). Is my theory ad hoc? Are its elements lacking consistency and good fit between themselves? Carrier constantly emphasizes the fact that my evidence is **consistent** with my theory but doesn't thereby prove it, and I'll of course agree to that. But this very consistency speaks volumes. When each explanation of a passage or problem inherent in the record enjoys consistency and agreement with all the others, when each makes good sense while those of the other side make less so (as Carrier implies by his use of descriptives like "strange" and "bizarre"), when together they form a logical paradigm that covers every aspect of the evidence, whereas the other side's picture does not (giving me the "win" in the Argument to the Best Explanation, as Carrier has admitted), then we are definitely not dealing with two equally weak "ad hoc" theories, between which there is no basis on which to make any kind of choice. And in fact, Carrier goes on to offer a limited acknowledgement:

And Doherty is right that his theory is less ad hoc here. Unlike the "heavenly scheme" Doherty theorizes, which would be a **foundational** doctrine and thus **certainly** already explained to Paul's congregations from day one [*much earlier than that if it was a part of their religious and philosophical culture*] and thus have no cause to appear in his letters, debates and natural human curiosity about a **historical** Jesus would not be foundational at all, but would constantly arise out of the blue and have to be dealt with....What Doherty finds curious is that if Jesus died on earth, this would entail that all sorts of biographical and verbal facts about him would **certainly** come up in debates over Church doctrine **and** in natural human curiosity about the greatest man that ever lived. So it is indeed bizarre that neither ever came up, in a way that it is not bizarre that the location of Jesus' death never came up, if it took place in heaven—since that would already be a settled matter of foundational doctrine.

With this kind of admission, one wonders why Carrier is so reticent and guarded in his evaluation of the relative strength of the respective cases, or why he is so insistent on agnostic neutrality.

But on to Muller's Part Two.

Jesus and David: Romans 1:3

In chapter 8, on pages 82-84, Doherty works on Romans 1:1-4:

Ro 1:1-4 Darby "Paul, bondman of Jesus Christ, [a] called apostle, **Separated To** [set apart for] **God's Glad Tidings**, (which he had before promised by his prophets in holy writings,) concerning his Son (**Come** of David's seed **According To Flesh**, marked out Son of God in power, according to [the] Spirit of holiness, by resurrection of [the] dead) Jesus Christ our Lord;"

*Then Earl writes: "Is it a piece of historical information? If so, it is the only one Paul ever give us, for **No Other Feature Of Jesus' Human Incarnation Appears In His Letter.**" **Shock!!!** I'll answer that later ...*

Then Doherty actually does not address the issue of a human Jesus straight on, but drifts away from it by questioning the meaning of "God's gospel" --not one from Jesus-- (I agree with that), the historicity of 'Son of David', the origin of 'Son of God' and finally by introducing his concept of the fleshy lower heaven. Nothing much is related to the

*"incarnation"; only some "explanation" is thrown against it, such as:
 "... for scripture was full of predictions that the Messiah would be descended from David.
 In reading these, Paul **Would** have applied them to his own version of the Christ, **The Christ Who Is A Spiritual Entity**, not a human one."
 So now human ancestry was assigned to Jesus by Paul, even if the later (allegedly) thought Christ was never an earthly man! Does that make sense? Of course not. If angel Gabriel is thought to be a spiritual entity, you do not make him a descendant of Moses!
 Furthermore, Earl's argumentation is dependant on Paul being the first one to claim Christ's ancestry from David. Is is realistic?
 According to the Pauline letters, there were many other apostles/preachers (1Co1:12,9:2-5; 2Co11:5,13,23a,12:11; Php1:14-17; Gal1:6-7), some "in Christ" before Paul (Ro16:7), some preaching different 'Jesus' (2Co11:4), and all of them Jew (2Co11:22-23a): in this context, what are the odds on Paul making this "discovery"?*

This is so disjointedly presented, full of confusion and misreadings, it is very difficult to respond. So I'll match Muller's approach and make several points haphazardly. No one would claim that the angel Gabriel is descended from Moses, not because the idea is supposedly ludicrous, but because nowhere in scripture is this suggested. And who said Paul was the first to draw the conclusion that Jesus was descended from David? How is my argument dependent upon this? There are some scholars who think Paul may even be quoting a piece of hymnic liturgy here. It matters not whether this idea was original to Paul (though it may be), just that he believed scripture indicated that his Christ bore some relationship to David. Since scripture does indeed make such a connection, and since prevailing philosophy regarded the upper world as containing parallels to all things earthly, this is hardly "throwing an explanation at it." Muller also misapplies the idea of parallels in the heavenly world. No one is saying that Paul regarded the *spiritual* Christ as a descendant of the *earthly* David, or that this descendancy was literal in the earthly sense, only that in some way, in the workings of the higher, "real" and "primary" world, some relationship existed which scripture revealed. Carrier calls for some explication on my part of the meaning of Davidic descent in Paul's mind, but I don't know how he thought about it. When I read something like the 5th Oration by Julian, I understand the words and the philosophic principles involved, but the ideas are so alien to my own outlook on the universe, it is difficult to comprehend how Julian's own mind could accept and understand them. Thus, I am not in a position to say (and I suspect none of us are) how Paul specifically understood his scripture-based idea that the divine Christ he believed in was related to David. (I have also pointed out previously that since such an idea was based on the Jewish scriptures, we cannot expect to find a similar idea reflected in pagan writings about their savior gods, even if we did possess more of such writings.)

Michael Turton on the Internet Infidels discussion forum "Biblical History and Criticism" had this to say about Muller's above paragraph:

The opening paragraph of Bernard's analysis contains not a single argument against Doherty, it is merely a heap of rhetoric, using words like "drifts" and "obsessively" to evoke emotional rather than rational responses in the reader, or conclusory rhetoric "Does that make sense? Of course not!" as if this were an argument. Unfortunately, Bernard does not tell us here why this does not make sense.

Turton goes on in regard to:

Is There Nothing Else About A Human Jesus In 'Romans'? Of course not, but all of the ensuing verses from 'Romans' are ignored in Doherty's book:
 A) Ro15:12 Darby "And again, Esaias says, There shall be the **Root Of Jesse** [David's father],

and **One** [Christ, according to Paul] that arises, to rule over [the] nations: in him shall [the] nations hopes."

Here Jesus' alleged descentance from David is reiterated.

B) Ro8:3 Darby "... God, having **Sent His Own Son**, in likeness of **Flesh Of Sin ...**"

Don't we have a clear expression for incarnation? See here for an explanation on "likeness".

C) Ro9:4-5a YLT "**Israelites**, ... whose [are] the fathers, and **Of Whom [Is] The Christ, According To The Flesh ...**"

Here Jesus is from Israelites, "according to the flesh". Who else are Israelites? Paul, according to Ro11:1, quoted later, and also many of his contemporaries, **By Flesh:**

Ro9:3b-4a NASB "... **My Brethren, My Kinsmen** [Paul's] **According To The Flesh, Who Are Israelites ...**" Did Paul think himself and his brethren/kinsmen lived "in the sphere of the flesh", some upper world above earth? NO!

Bernard's arguments here contain only misunderstandings and misinterpretations. First, he claims "...all of the ensuing verses from 'Romans' are ignored in Doherty's book." Bernard clearly does not understand Doherty's point. If the first reference to Jesus being of David's stock (in Romans 1) can be shown to be symbolic, then all subsequent references to it are similarly symbolic. Thus, simply piling on more quotes, as Bernard does here, will not make Doherty's arguments disappear. Bernard must come up with compelling reasons to reject them, either on linguistic or content grounds. In any case, Doherty spends several pages in several places discussing the problem of Jesus' alleged Davidic ancestry (82-85, for example). Finally, there is a telling Doherty-style silence here. If Jesus had really been born of David, Paul, after all, knew his brother, James. All Paul had to do was cite his personal knowledge of the family of Jesus and firmly link Jesus to the mortal sphere. But no, Paul's ideas come from divine revelation. Doherty has a very strong argument here, and Bernard's rhetoric cannot dismantle it.

Bernard then goes on to say: "B) Ro8:3 Darby '... God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin ...' Don't we have a clear expression of incarnation here?" Merely asking this question does not refute Doherty's point. Bernard would have to demonstrate that the word likeness here means something other than what it very plainly says. All Bernard does here is use an emotional appeal to invite the reader to fall back on the biases built in by 2000 years of historicist exegesis. He does not make an argument based on logic, content, linguistics, or history anywhere in these remarks.

More often than not, Muller simply settles for drawing the most ludicrous parallel he can come up with and then by ridiculing it, thinks he has discredited my position. First of all, *kata sarka* is one of the most recurring phrases in the Pauline corpus, with all manner of meaning. (Muller has already been called to task for assigning the same meaning in all circumstances to some particular word or phrase with variant application.) No one would claim that its usage in Romans 9:3 in regard to Paul's own kinsfolk signifies "in the sphere of the flesh" or is identical to its usage in Romans 1:3, no matter what the latter's meaning. In fact, if Muller had bothered to think a little longer about this particular verse and consult a number of translations, he might have concluded why Paul inserted it here. If all Paul was concerned with was making a reference to his fellow Jews, he would have had no need to insert *kata sarka* at all. Why did he do so? Probably for clarification. Once he used "brothers" to refer to those of his own race, perhaps he felt the need to make it clear he was not referring to *Christian* "brothers" in the sense of fellow believers, and so he added "my kinsmen according to the flesh." If Muller had consulted the NEB, or the NIV, or the RSV, or the (often useful) *Translator's New Testament*, he would have found translations like "my natural kinsfolk," "those of my own race," "my kinsmen by race," and "my own flesh and blood," all translations which reflect their recognition of what Paul meant by *kata sarka* on this occasion.

If one looks carefully at the following verses here (9:4-5), which Muller and others regularly appeal to, one finds that the words actually fall far short of saying that Christ is of "human descent" in regard to his "human ancestry," the sort of phrases which regularly appear in translations. In fact, Christ is simply tacked on at the end of a long list of things that are the 'property' of the people of Israel, things that belong to them, such as the covenant, the Law and the promises. The phrase is literally, "...and from whom [the Israelites] the Christ according to the flesh." Our ubiquitous, vague, stereotyped phrase, *kata sarka*. Not even here could Paul speak more clearly and more normally about actual "human descent." Upon such an oddity, Muller, and just about everyone else, has truly "thrown an explanation," governed by the Gospels. In regard to Christ "belonging" to the people of Israel, I am often challenged for saying that the savior gods could be accorded an ethnic identity. Muller says "I am not aware of any." Carrier asks for examples. But they are making too much of my remark. On some level, Osiris was identified as Egyptian. Gods such as Dionysos and Attis were given close associations with their peoples of origin, especially in the initial stages of their cults. It would not be unusual for Paul to regard his savior figure, growing to some extent out of the Jewish tradition, as identifiable with that racial group. Such a viewpoint could well be operating in regard to his "born under the Law" in Galatians 4:4.

In the crucial matter of the meaning of Romans 1:1-4, Muller has the following to say, and Carrier responds:

Doherty postulates "from the seed of David" is part of "God's gospel" (drawn from the scriptures by Paul, as Earl contends). This seems to be largely due to his (inaccurate) translation:

"**The Gospel** concerning his Son **Who** arose from the seed of David ..." (Ro1:3)

That's partly from the RSV, but the **Greek** does **Not** have "**The Gospel**" and "**Who**" (&"arose" is Earl's own translation)!

The Greek most definitely **does** have those words. The subject of the clause in 1:3 is the "Gospel" of 1:1. Anyone who reads Greek would know that. Likewise, the Greek says "*tou huiou autou tou genomenou*," literally, "the son, his, the one (i.e. son) who came to be." It is perfectly legitimate to translate "his son, the one who" as "his son, who"—this is called the definite article in the attributive position, and the meaning is identical.

As for "arose," that is a valid translation of *genomenos*, which is a very ambiguous word with wide scope in its possible meanings. It literally means "become" but connotes any of the following with equal frequency: "be / is" or "happen / take place" or "arise / come about" or "be born / be created / come into being" or "show up / be present." Doherty's choice is not contentious.

However [quoting Muller]: "The digression starting by 'come of David's seed...' is linked to 'his Son' and not likely to 'God's glad tidings'." That is certainly correct. But I am not aware of Doherty saying such a thing. Doherty is saying that the whole unit "his son come from David's seed" is part of the content of the Gospel. That is certainly correct on the Greek. So I don't fathom Muller's point here.

To conclude, it is highly improbable Paul meant he just found "come of David's seed" from the scriptures (and had to divulge it!), as Doherty contends.

I couldn't disagree more. The Greek is unmistakable: the Gospel (1:1) is what was presaged in the OT (1:2) and the content of that Gospel is described in the whole of 1:3-4 (and probably also as the basis for 1:5-6). That's what the Greek says. Period. This also has strong support elsewhere (cf. Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3; one sees a hint in 2 Cor. 3:12-18 to 4:4; etc.)...It is in fact **probable**

that Paul meant he found the content of the Gospel in the OT. Of course, historicists don't dispute that—they all agree that the entire content of the Gospel was presaged in the OT.

I've reproduced the Muller-Carrier exchange here at some length because it should help clarify things for many who make claims similar to Muller's, that Paul simply doesn't mean what he clearly seems to say, and which Carrier agrees he does say. But Carrier is nevertheless fuzzy on a couple of points. First of all, his statement about "historicists" is hardly accurate, and contains a contradiction. I'm certainly not aware of all historicists (which presumably includes New Testament scholars) agreeing that Paul found the content of his gospel in the Old Testament. In fact, they are usually at pains to claim that he "received" it from previous apostles, those who had known the historical Jesus. They hardly agree that the *kata tas graphas* of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 conforms to my own suggested meaning, that scripture was the *source* of Paul's doctrines about the Christ rather than a prophecy of them. Carrier reverts to the universal interpretation of things when he says that they agree the content of Paul's gospel was "*presaged*" in scripture, but this is not the same thing as *deriving* the gospel *from* it. Now, if all Carrier means by 'found the content in the OT' is that it was presaged there, this is hardly contentious and doesn't serve to support me against Muller. Carrier also misses the huge anomaly I have pointed out in regard to this passage, that if information about Paul's gospel of the Son were 'pre-announced' in scripture, this would be a pre-announcement of Jesus himself, his life and saving acts. But Paul makes no such connection. Scripture forecast the gospel, nothing else. He imposes no human man between the content or prophecy of scripture and his own derivation of the gospel from that scripture, leading to the conclusion that he knew of no historical Jesus. Of course, he does this sort of thing all through his letters, and so do the writers who came after him, forging epistles in his name. (The best example is in Titus 1:3.)

*And Doherty keeps obsessively interpreting anything as concerning an entirely mythical Jesus: again for him, "according to the flesh" becomes "in the sphere of the flesh", with the "sphere" being "the lowest heavenly sphere, associated with the material world"! The translation as "in the sphere of the flesh" is according to Doherty "a **Suggestion** put forward by C. K. Barrett." He adds "Such a translation is, in fact, quite **Useful** and **Possibly Accurate**." No doubt! Doherty is treating that "possibly accurate" "suggestion" from "a translation" as if it were a piece of primary evidence.*

Carrier says that he agrees, but both are getting a little carried away. In all discussions of the possible translation of *kata sarka*, I present Barrett's suggestion as simply making possible my interpretation, as an "explanatory fit" with my theory. But that's all I need. I am hardly claiming to prove my case by thinking to show that this is the only possible translation. People like Muller lose sight of the fact that so much of the argument commonly made against me (and of course he does this himself) is based on assorted claims that this-or-that cannot possibly mean such-and-such, or allow such-and-such an interpretation. (It's like the creationist claiming that life could not possibly have evolved in the primeval soup without divine direction.) All I have to do is demonstrate that it *could* (which in the matter of evolution, scientists have), that such-and-such a meaning *is* possible, either by demonstrating it technically (as Carrier has frequently done for me) or by appealing to a respected scholar who himself allows for such a meaning, even if he doesn't draw my conclusions from that meaning.

But Doherty does not stop here. He contends "according to the spirit" can also be translated as "in the sphere of the "spirit"" (and from NO "suggestion" by anyone else!).

I'm sure he could find someone—and I wish he would....For myself, Doherty's translation is plausible on the Greek and is implied by Paul's discussion in 1 Cor. 15, which uses abstract nouns to refer to the realm of the spiritual body as the realm of indecay, glory,

*immortality, etc., and he distinguishes flesh vs. spirit as between earth and heaven. So Paul would certainly have *understood* the idea of being in the realm of spirit vs. the realm of flesh.*

Before commenting, I'll reproduce what Muller says following shortly on his previous remark:

*But what did Barrett mean by "sphere" in that context? Here it is:
"The preposition here rendered '**In The Sphere Of** Could Also Be Rendered '**According To,**' and 'according to the flesh' is a common Pauline phrase; in this verse, however, Paul does not mean that on a fleshly (human) judgment Jesus was a descendant of David, but that **In The Realm Denoted By The Word Flesh (Humanity) He Was Truly A Descendant Of David.**" C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, page 78.
Barrett never meant a fleshy heaven, in any context. Not even close!*

Of course Barrett didn't mean by his translation that Christ was a descendant of David in a fleshly heaven. I never claimed he did. I was simply making use of Barrett's translation in my own context, and there's nothing illegitimate in that. But it's curious that Muller makes a very selective quotation of Barrett's text from his Romans commentary. Barrett provides his translation of *both* passages in question immediately preceding Muller's quote:

"in the sphere of the flesh, born of the family of David;
in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, appointed Son of God."

I wonder that Muller overlooked this preceding sentence (set apart and in bold print from the rest of the text) when he claimed that I have used "in the sphere of the spirit" with "NO suggestion from anyone else". (Incidentally, the passage from Barrett's text is found on page 20, not page 78 as Muller has it.)

But let's not stop there. Naturally, Barrett regards 1:3 as referring to Jesus' descent-from-David status as a man, not as a heavenly being. And what does he envision for verse 4? He says (p.20),

" 'In the sphere of the Holy Spirit he was appointed Son of God.' This translation is not universally accepted. For 'in the sphere of' see above [*referring to the earlier part of his text discussed above*]. 'The Holy Spirit' is literally 'spirit of holiness', and this has been taken to refer not to the Holy Spirit, but to Jesus' own (human) spirit, marked as it was by the attribute of holiness."

Clearly, Barrett does not accept this common understanding, since it would not be compatible with his 'in the sphere of' translation, and he goes on to discuss the point without an abundance of clarity (p.20-21). In fact, what exactly is Barrett's specific understanding of his "in the sphere of the Holy Spirit" is not all that clear either. He has failed to see that the meaning, the location, entailed in his phrase "in the sphere of the spirit" should be determined by the actions attached to it: namely, Jesus being declared Son of God in power (by/as a result of the resurrection of the dead—presumably *his* resurrection, although the actual words cryptically say "by a resurrection of dead persons"). More importantly, that meaning should also be determined by the overall implication in the passage (1-4), that these actions by Christ are to be *found in (derived from) scripture*, as Paul tells us. Thus the assumption ought not to be that the ambiguous "spirit" reference can somehow apply to an earthly Jesus or an earthly context, but rather should be seen as located in heaven, in the realm/sphere of the spirit. And scripture ought to be surveyed to find exactly what passage may have produced this idea. As far as I know, no one before myself (and certainly not Barrett, who gets bogged down in the question of whether this couplet of verse 3-4

is pre-Pauline and whether it had an anti-adoptionist agenda) has suggested that the whole of verse 4 has simply been derived from Psalm 2:7-8:

"I will tell of the decree of the LORD:

He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession...' "

Here, surely, is Romans 1:4's designation of Jesus as Son of God, plus the "in power," which is extended to having the Son receive lordship over all in earth and heaven following his death and resurrection, a common idea in the epistles (e.g., Phil. 2:10-11). With this convenient and rather obvious scriptural source for verse 4, taken in conjunction with the statement in verse 2 that Paul's gospel was to be found in scripture itself, there is no impediment, and a lot of persuasive reason, to interpret verse 4 as a heavenly event, which would make the "in the spirit" a reference to a location, a "sphere," namely heaven, and not some attribute of Christ.

All of which makes it very likely that verse 3 conforms to the same scriptural context as everything else, namely that the Son's relationship to David is also something derived from scripture, and has no more historical import than verse 4.

I think enough has been said in this area. Since Muller's text is so disorganized, any further attempt at a response may well bring a case of fatigue upon both writer and reader, so I will pass over the remainder of Muller's and Carrier's discussion in regard to Romans, and move on to Galatians 4, with its "born of woman."

Born of Woman

Muller's argument in this section is particularly disjointed, shifting forward and back through chapters 3 and 4 of Galatians. I will try to rearrange it into some semblance of order.

3.2.3. By Examining The Whole Of Galatians 3:15-4:7, Can We Figure Out What Kind Of Woman Paul Was Thinking For Gal 4:4?

*Paul started by making a claim: "But to **Abraham** were the **Promises Addressed, And To His Seed**: he does not say, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed; which is **Christ**." (3:16 Darby)*

*That seems to refer to Genesis 17-22 but it is never specified here according to Paul's words. Anyway, the promise is about inheritance (3:18) for all (Gentiles and Jews -- 3:28-29, 3:8, 14) but the former is supplanted by the Law "until the seed [Christ] **Came** ['erchomai', clear expression of the first coming!] to whom the promise was made" (3:16, 19). Then everyone would be liberated from the Law by Christ (3:22-24, 3:13) and "the promise, on the principle of **Faith Of Jesus Christ**, should be given to **Those That Believe**." (3:22), allowing Paul's Galatians to be God's sons & heirs and honorary seeds of Abraham (3:29, 4:7, 3:7).*

Paul's reasoning, his exegesis of scripture, in chapters 3 and 4 of Galatians probably reflects the most convoluted thinking and argumentation in all of his letters. But his purpose should be clear. He needs a way to assign God's "promise" to Abraham to his gentile readers, his converts in Galatia. After all, centuries of Jewish mythology clearly assigned that promise to the Jews themselves, as descendants of Abraham. Paul's Galatian converts were not Jews. How, then, to make them (and gentile Christians in general) the genuine recipients of that promise? He does this by reinterpreting the idea of Abraham's "seed" (*sperma*). Because the word in scripture (*passim*, in Genesis) was singular, Paul claims it refers to a singular individual (3:16). He

identifies that individual as Christ. Now, this is more than a bit absurd, in that the content of God's promises to Abraham would hardly be applicable to Jesus Christ as one human individual, let alone as the divine Son of God. And while the "seed" in Genesis is certainly in the singular, it is a collective singular; indeed, "seeds" could never be used in the plural in such a context, as it would make no sense. A person's descendants are collectively referred to in the singular when using the "seed" terminology. So Paul is blatantly reaching here, and no amount of 'spinning' by New Testament commentators can make it seem sensible or acceptable.

The object of Paul's sleight of hand becomes clear by the end of chapter 3. Through faith, his readers, and all who have been baptized into Christ, have become "sons of God" and have "put on Christ" (3:27). They are all "one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). To drive the conclusion home, he says: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Christ interpreted as Abraham's (singular) "seed" has served the purpose of providing a link between Abraham and those who Paul claims are the true heirs of the promise to Abraham, namely Christians. This, of course, is in keeping with the central claim of the Christian sect, continuing to this day, that God rejected the Jews and transferred his favor onto believers in Christ.

Thus Paul's sight is fixed upon Christians. It is they who are the "seed" and they who have "come" and inherited the promise made to Abraham. The "seed" as *Christ* is simply a stepping-stone. Thus Muller's claim that we can tease out an historical Jesus in Paul's mind from all of this is falling into the trap that Paul's very self-serving exegesis has left behind. Let's see how we can avoid the pieces of that trap. First of all, what is it that has "come" in the present time, as Paul presents it? Follow this succession of verses (using *The Translator's New Testament*):

19. Why then was the Law necessary at all? It was introduced to show what transgressions are, but it was to last only until the 'seed' should come to whom the promise had been directly made....

23. Before faith came we were held imprisoned under law until the faith which was to come should be revealed. 24. And so the Law has been like a guardian escorting us to Christ, that we might be made right with God through faith; 25. but now that faith has come we are no longer under a guardian.

In verses 23 and 25, what has "come" in the present time is faith, faith in Christ Jesus. It is not Jesus who has come. No historical figure is inserted between the centuries-old Law and the coming of faith. Verse 24 makes that sequence clear: the Law as a precursor leads not to Christ himself as an historical man, but to faith in Christ; Law is followed by—supplanted by—revelation, and faith in that revelation. This is the pattern constantly repeated throughout Paul's epistles, from Romans 1 on. If Paul still has "Christ" in mind in verse 19 as his definition of the "seed," it is only as a symbol, a link to those inheritors of the promise, the true seed he is so at pains to create, namely those who have been baptized into Christ (v.27). Paul has made it clear elsewhere that he regards the baptized believer as part of the body of Christ, and this mystical concept serves to join Christ and the body of believers into the collective "seed" he speaks of throughout this chapter. There is thus no way for us to separate those two wedded elements in Paul's mind and declare exactly what he has in mind as "coming" in verse 19. In any case, we can take any thought of Christ "coming" in the same way that it is presented throughout the New Testament epistles, namely as a spiritual figure that has been "revealed" in the present time, through scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Verse 22 says this: "But scripture has established that everything is imprisoned by sin so that the promise, based on faith in Jesus Christ, might be given only to those who have faith." Here, Paul can no longer sustain the charade that the object, the recipient, of the promise—as he

manipulated it in 3:16—is Christ himself. Rather, the promise falls on the Christian, through *faith* in Christ. The link to Christ is symbolic and mystical. There is nothing to suggest that it has anything to do with a recent human man who was himself the supposed "seed" of Abraham and recipient of the promise. Throughout this entire passage, Paul spends not a word in describing or enlarging upon the recent earthly activities of Christ as "seed" of Abraham, the one who had supposedly played such a role in salvation history, thus making Muller's declaration here simply a reading of the Gospel background into the thought of the epistle:

What remains is for the Son/Christ to come as the seed of Abraham, that is as a Jew and earthly human (as other seeds of Abraham, like Paul, as previously discussed), in order to enable the promise.

In fact, Paul's silence is an almost outright exclusion. If a Jesus on earth had been the principal agent of transition between the Law and the new system of salvation, Paul could hardly have failed to provide some hint of such an idea in his elaborate exegesis in this chapter, some reflection of the earthly career of Abraham's "seed." And note Paul's somewhat cryptic contrast in verses 19 to 20:

"19. ...[the Law] was transmitted by angels and by the hand of an intermediary. 20. Now where only one party is acting there is no need for an intermediary. And God is one."

The elements of this passage have most commentators scratching their heads, and interpretations have been legion. But even though the reference in verse 20 seems to relate most directly to the event of God making his promise to Abraham, it comes in the larger context of the transition from the old to the new, from the Law to salvation in Christ as fulfillment of that promise. How can Paul leave this anomalous idea hanging in the air? Where is the *intermediary* Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, preaching in his own person the new salvation, preaching himself as the channel to that salvation? If Paul highlights the giving of the Law as something done by God through intermediaries, through angels and (apparently) Moses, if he implies a contrast of quality between the Law and the promise based on one using intermediaries and the other not, how can he do this without taking into account the idea of Jesus on earth being God's own intermediary in the giving of the Law's replacement and the fulfilling of the promise? Paul's contrast here would certainly be compromised. Yet clearly, there *is* no problem for Paul. It is *faith* in Christ that has supplanted the Law, and this faith has come not through any historical intermediary but by revelation, directly from God; all of it is fully in keeping with the contrast Paul has expressed between the Law and the promise.

In regard to Muller's comments on Christ as the "seed" of Abraham, and the "coming" of that seed (3:16-19), Michael Turton on IIDB had this to say:

Bernard takes this passage to say the verb 'come' here implies a first coming on earth. Nowhere is that present in this passage. The whole discussion is an abstract discussion of the Law and Christ. "Came" here simply represents the appearance of Jesus in our reality, not necessarily on earth. If Paul had meant come on earth, he would have said it. Bernard is simply back-reading the story of the Gospels into Paul, invoking his and the reader's unconscious assumptions -- the ones Doherty wants you to give up -- in interpreting these passages. Pulling a whole history on earth out of a single verb is the ultimate in historicist desperation....

Here I think Bernard goes badly wrong. In Gal 3:16 he has misread the last sentence. It does not say Christ is of Abraham's seed. Rather it says (to expand it properly): "And to thy seed; [a promise] which is Christ." In other words, read in context, *it does not say* that Christ is of

Abraham's seed. It says that Christ is *the fulfillment of a promise* to Abraham's seed. Bernard has erred again (on the same point) and thus, his argument falls to pieces.

Now, this is actually a very interesting take on 3:16. While I'm not quite ready to commit to it, such an interpretation would get Paul out of an awkward exegetical jam. Grammatically, it could work, and since the close association in Paul's mind and argument between Christ and believers linked to him makes them both equally the personification of the "seed" of Abraham, we could so interpret Paul's thought behind the words. Paul has stressed the "coming of faith" and the appearance, if you will, of those who believe in Christ, an entity revealed only now by apostles like himself. In that sense, then, Christ has clearly "come" in the present time. We need see no thought of a coming by Christ in the flesh in recent history.

3.2.1. Doherty On Galatians4:4

Gal4:4 YLT "... **God Sent forth His Son, Come** ['ginomai'] **Of A Woman, Come Under The Law**"

In chapter 12, page 123-125, Doherty comments on "born of woman" from Gal4:4. He admits this passage "most suggests that he [Paul] has a human Jesus in mind."

But then he goes to work, starting by "God sent his own Son", but "forget" to take in account Ro8:3 Darby "... God, having **Sent His Own Son**, in likeness of **Flesh Of Sin** ..." (the "sent" Son is not a spirit, as Earl argues (p.123) (& why would a woman be needed for the Son to "become" a spirit)! See also here for an explanation on "likeness")!

His convoluted argumentation does not disprove anything and looks rather like a series of red herrings. He is trying to raise doubts by way of speculative suppositions, using expressions "this can be taken", "seem", "not necessarily tied", "do not have to be seen" & "one interpretation that could be given" in order to counteract the obvious.

And any writing/myth known during Paul's time is considered a likely inspiration, such as Isa7:14 and Dionysos' birth, as if no man were born of woman in antiquity!

If I had used expressions which were more definite, rather than these "speculative suppositions," I would no doubt have been accused of making firm declarations based on little or weak evidence. The point in dealing with passages like Galatians 4:4 is not to "prove" that they have meanings entirely in keeping with the mythicist position, but that they *can* enjoy alternate interpretations and do not have to be seen as conforming to traditional readings. It is the fact that something has for so long been regarded as "obvious" which is what must be counteracted. The language I use in arguing such passages, and which Muller so disdainfully dismisses, is the proper approach. (The question of "likeness" in regard to other passages has been discussed in my Part Two of this response.)

Before focusing in on the central passage of Galatians 4:4-7, let's see how Muller brings in a later passage, the "allegory" of 4:21-31.

3.2.2. Comments On Richard Carrier's Review On Doherty's Book About Galatians4:4

Richard wrote: "I am surprised he doesn't point out the most important support for his position: the fact that Paul actually says in the same letter that one woman he is talking about is allegorical, representing the "heavenly" Jerusalem, not an actual woman (Gal. 4:23-31)."

Carrier is correct into mentioning the allegorical woman in Gal4:26-27 (even if 'woman' is never spelled out!), but the whole passage (Gal4:24-27) is presented as an allegory. It is only here that Paul used the word-root 'allegoreo' (allegory) and also 'sustoicheo' (correspond) in all his epistles. Therefore he indicated the ensuing verses should not to be taken literally, including the "our mother" in 4:26 (the heavenly Jerusalem) and the "her" in 4:27 (as a quote from Isa54:1, where she is Jerusalem). In any case, Paul was clear about not referring to a real human female here. He did not even employ the word 'woman'!

And he never said the woman in Gal4:4 stands for the heavenly Jerusalem! Furthermore, all other women in Paul's letters are earthly ones, including the two right after Gal4:4, the biblical Hagar and Sarah (not named but identified as the "freewoman") (Gal4:21-25).

Confusion abounds here, and to some extent I think Carrier shares in it. Muller's argument is designed to counter Carrier's 'support' of my position by pointing out an essential difference between Paul's reference to a "woman" in 4:4, and his reference to two women (not just one) in 4:21f. This difference is allegedly that in the latter case, Paul specifically declares such women to be allegorical, whereas he makes no such declaration in regard to the woman of 4:4; by this, he seeks to disqualify Carrier's suggestion that the allegory of 4:21f supports my meaning of 4:4. Actually, I neither see nor claim a significant connection between the two. The confusion is based on an equating of "allegorical" with "mythical," which is not the same thing, even if they may be said to share some common applications. Paul does not declare the woman of 4:4 to be allegorical because there is no allegory involved. She doesn't "represent" anything, no more than him saying in Romans 1:3 that the Son is "of David's seed" has an allegorical meaning. Christ of the seed of David doesn't "represent" anything either. It is a factum about the Son regarding his nature in the spiritual dimension, derived from scripture; just as, I maintain (and will discuss shortly), Christ could have been declared "born of woman, born under the law" under the influence of scripture —probably Isaiah 7:14—and for other philosophical necessities.

Having said this, I will agree that a general form of "support" may be derived from the allegory passage, in the sense that all of Paul's imagery throughout these chapters is concerned with symbolic relationships, not history let alone historical individuals, and all of it is designed to further his purpose here, namely to identify his Christian (and largely gentile) readers with the proper seed of Abraham and set them apart from traditional interpretations so as to make them the true inheritors of God's promise. (Verses 28-29 and 31 return like a kind of summation to the theme that Paul's readers are the children of the promise.) It follows that we should see his reference to Christ "born of woman" as also furthering that purpose.

Muller declares that all other woman in Paul's letters are earthly ones, including the two in the Galatians allegory, which is simply falling once again into the trap of making all variable usages of a term conform to a single definition. Besides, the "woman" in Galatians 4:4 is not given a name, and she is not identified with any character (literary or otherwise) whom Paul can be shown to have known. The "woman" of 4:4 is simply generic. She is there to serve the overall purpose, to characterize the "son" in a certain way as part of Paul's argument. The question is, what is that characterization, and can he have achieved it by assigning Christ to a woman in a mythological sense, based on an application of scripture?

It has often been pointed out that there seems little reason why Paul should have bothered in Galatians 4:4 to specify Christ as "born of woman." Why would such an obvious 'fact' need stating? To some extent, it's a valid question, but it needs to be answered in the context of the passage. That passage runs, using the NEB translation:

"3. ...During our minority we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, 4. but when the term was completed [*lit., when the fullness of time came*], God sent his own Son, born of (a) woman, born under (the) law, to purchase freedom for the subjects of the law, 5. in order that we might attain the status of sons. 6. To prove that you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying 'Abba! Father!' 7. You are therefore no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's own act an heir."

There are a lot of pitfalls in this passage, buried mines which make it treacherous to simply charge ahead, as people like Muller do, declaring that it can all mean only one thing. It is, as I

have admitted and as Muller throws back at me, the passage in all the epistles which most seems to suggest that Paul has a human Jesus in mind, but it is by no means that straightforward. Earlier in this response to Muller, I discussed at some length the idea of paradigmatic parallel, the foundation of so much of the soteriological thinking of the time. Just as the savior god or heavenly champion was thought of as representing or experiencing things in common with those he was linked to, thus guaranteeing common beneficial results such as resurrection and exaltation, the idea of being "born of woman" can be seen as part of that commonality. So could "born under (the) law" (the definite article does not appear in the Greek, though it may be understood). Paul's purpose in making this statement would be to strengthen the paradigmatic parallel: as Jesus took on our nature, our 'slavery' under the law, he is best placed to achieve our freedom from it. But is it an earthly, human nature and slavery he has taken on? Or is this simply part of the mythological picture painted throughout the epistles, and indeed throughout the entire salvation thinking of the era? Is it a "taking on" in that pattern of "likeness" we find emphasized in both Christian/Jewish and pagan writings where savior deities are concerned? Muller is at pains to dismiss my interpretation of "likeness," but it is not so easily got rid of. It is repeatedly emphasized in places where it should be unnecessary, misleading or redundant, as in the 'descending' half of the Philippians christological hymn, or Romans 8:3, or the Ascension of Isaiah 9. The entire concept of descending redeemers (recurring in gnostic texts) is dependent on them receiving 'bodies' and performing/suffering things that are human-like but not specifically physical and historical. Savior god mythology casts them in the likeness of human experiences which (according to Plutarch) belong to the mythical and spiritual realm, not the earthly historical sphere. The paradigmatic parallel—as for example between the Righteous One/Messiah Son of Man in heaven and the righteous on earth in the Similitudes of Enoch—is based on the relationship between heaven and earth, between spiritual and earthly manifestations. There is no impediment to interpreting Galatians 4:4 in the same vein.

If a good argument can be made to see the "of David's seed" in Romans 1:3 as something mythological, as derived from scripture, if the descending-ascending redeemer of the Philippians hymn can be seen as conforming to gnostic mythology about non-human savior figures (as in *The Apocalypse of Adam* and *The Apocryphon of John*), then Galatians 4:4 should be no tougher a nut to crack. Paul affirms Jesus' issuance from woman and slavery to the law because it serves his soteriological picture; it further links Christ with those who are made sons and given freedom from the law. It is another piece of his overall argument in these chapters designed to make his readers the object and inheritors of the promise, through Christ. Consider the earlier verse 3:13. "Christ bought us freedom from the curse of the law by becoming for our sake an accursed thing; for Scripture says, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'." If the mythicist argument can make a good case for regarding such a 'hanging' as a mythical/spiritual event (as it has in regard to passages like 1 Corinthians 2:8, Colossians 2:15, the Ascension of Isaiah 9:14, and even Hebrews with its sacrifice in heaven), if it can point to scripture as the source of belief in such an event, (as in 1 Peter 2:22 and 1 Clement 16 and certain statements in the epistle of Barnabas, as well as Paul's own statements concerning "*tas graphas*" and God himself as the source of his gospel about the Christ), then Christ being "born of woman" is no further a reach. If Christ in a mythical context can take on a cursed nature, he can take on genesis 'from woman.' If Paul regards him as taking on this cursed nature as part of Christ's assumption of paradigmatic features to facilitate the process of salvation, he can regard him as taking on genesis from woman for the same purpose, especially when he has scripture telling him so in both cases.

One critic claimed: "The Jewish law is binding on the descendants of Abraham. It does not apply to angels or demons or divine effluences. If Jesus was born under the law, then Jesus was born into a Jewish family." Yet Jesus, as a divine effluence, took on the cursed nature of Deuteronomy 27:26, expanding its meaning beyond that relating to the fate of Hebrew criminals (another case of Paul casting his divine Christ according to scriptural sources). One has to be

careful about declaring that ideas have very restricted limits and can never undergo evolution and wider application. Casting a glance back to Part One, this is indeed "a failure of imagination."

Galatians 4:4-7

Before going further and introducing a new piece of evidence, let's look at those mines buried at shallow level in the landscape of Galatians 4:4-7. Each one may not have a fatal explosive force in itself, but collectively they raise enough dust and blow a deep enough hole to obscure any historical Jesus.

1. When did God "send his own Son"? Once again, it is uncanny how Paul can consistently fail to use words which would locate Jesus in historical time, let alone his own recent past. "In the fullness of time" is pretty woolly, and in fact probably applies to the idea of the fullness of the time in which God had allowed the Jewish Law to have force. (The NEB opts for this meaning in its "but when the term was completed," referring to the period of enslavement to the Law.) When that term had expired, what arrived? Not Jesus himself, but as Paul has just stated it (3:23 and 25), *faith* in him. At God's appropriate time, he revealed his Son through apostles like Paul (as it is represented in passages like Galatians 1:16, Romans 16:25-27, Colossians 2:2, 2 Timothy 1:10, Titus 1:3), the Son who is described as a former secret long-hidden.

2. What precisely did God send? "God sent his own Son" may be ambiguous, but verse 6 is not: "To prove that you are sons [*lit., because you are sons*], God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son..." The latter looks like an enlargement on the previous thought, and both are assigned to the present time, which would make the "sending" of the Son only that of his spirit. The two verbs of 'sending' are identical, and it is the same verb commonly used when speaking of the "sending" of the Holy Spirit, or of spiritual beings such as angels or Wisdom.

3. Who was acting in the present? Consider this succession of ideas through verses 4 to 7:

"God sent his own Son...to purchase freedom for [*lit., in order that he might redeem*] the subjects of the law, in order that we might attain the status of sons.... You are therefore no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's own act an heir."

Grammatically speaking, there is an ambiguity in the first two phrases, in both English and Greek. "God" is the main subject, and could be said to govern the entire sentence. Thus, it could be God himself who is the subject of the verb "purchase" or it could be the "Son." And yet, that ambiguity is surely resolved by the later phrase. The stated purpose of sending the Son (or his spirit) was to make believers "sons" of God. In verse 7, Paul identifies that result as due to an act of *God*, not the Son. The sense of the entire passage thus makes *God* the one who has "redeemed/purchased freedom." So Paul supposedly has God send the Son to earth, but doesn't present him as the one performing the redeeming act while he is there. The only context in which this makes sense is that the Son did not come to earth and live the Gospel events, but that God himself—drawing on Christ's death and rising in a spiritual dimension, at an unspecified time or in a timeless setting—is the one who has been responsible for redemption, by *revealing* Christ and his supernatural activities in the present time and making the resultant benefits available to those who have adopted faith in him, courtesy of Paul's preaching. This is the mode of expression found throughout the epistles.

Apologetic 'explanations' that since Jesus is God, or acting on God's behalf, it is legitimate for Paul to say that God does everything, are hardly compelling. I suggest that this is not the way the human mind works and does not explain the universal blind eye turned toward Jesus as the primary agent in their own time, which all the early writers seem to suffer from. Such an

explanation is simply an apologetic ploy, and a pretty lame one at that.

4. When was Christ "born"? Those two phrases qualifying the Son, "born of woman, born under the Law," are descriptive of the Son, but not necessarily tied to the present 'sending.' (See E. D. Burton, *International Critical Commentary, Galatians*, p.216f.) They have no necessary temporal relation to the verb "sent" and do not have to be seen as present occurrences. Thus they present no impediment to the scenario outlined in point 3.

5. And what of the word "born" as it is consistently translated? In fact, Paul does *not* use the normal, everyday word for giving or undergoing birth here, which would be "*gennaō*". Instead, he uses "*ginomai*" (as he does in Romans 1:3 in speaking of the Son "coming/arising" from the seed of David). *Ginomai* has a broad range of definition, as Carrier has pointed out, and "being born" is only one meaning of many. I have suggested that the use of *ginomai* may be indicative of Paul having something more in mind than simple human birth, but I could go further and say this: If Paul meant that Jesus was born of a human mother, he should have had no reason *not* to use the verb *gennaō*, which means just that. Consequently, we can conclude the strong likelihood that by using *ginomai*, Paul must be referring to something OTHER than birth by a human woman.

This conclusion is strengthened when we compare Paul's uses of *gennaō* vs. *ginomai* throughout his letters. Let's look at the other occasions in the Pauline corpus where birth is referred to:

- Romans 9:11 - [referring to Rebecca's children] "...but before they were born, when they had as yet done nothing good or ill..." Here Paul uses *gennaō*.

- 1 Corinthians 4:15 - "In Christ Jesus I became your father [*lit., I gave birth to you*] through the gospel." Here, even in a figurative context, Paul uses *gennaō*.

- Galatians 4:23, 24 and 29 - This the Sarah/Hagar allegory discussed above. In the three places in which Paul expresses the idea of birth—even within a declared allegorical context—he uses *gennaō*.

THE ONLY OCCASIONS WHEN HE USES *GINOMAI* TO REFER TO AN APPARENT 'BIRTH' ARE THOSE TWO REFERENCES TO CHRIST: in Romans 1:3 in being "born of David's seed" and in Galatians 4:4 in being "born of woman/under the law." (For the hymn in Philippians 2, see below.) In the entire corpus of early Christian writings, both inside and outside the New Testament, *there is no other case of the usage of "ginomai" to refer to human birth, including that of Jesus*. For Paul to make this distinction in terminology must be significant, and must mean something to him. The most compelling conclusion is that in both these cases regarding Christ he was not referring to human birth.

It is intriguing that, while modern translations opt for the word "born" in rendering the "*genomenon*" of verse 4, the older King James Version renders it "made of woman, made under the Law," and similarly uses "made" in Romans 1:3, even though it has no compunction about using "born" in translating *gennaō*, such as in the allegorical passage about the sons of Abraham later in Galatians 4. Now, I'm not suggesting that King James' translators shared my mythicist views, but might they instinctively have realized that this unusual use of *ginomai* by Paul in these two places seems to set them apart? I would call attention to Paul's reference to Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:45. The King James has it: "The first man Adam was made [*egeneto*, from *ginomai*] a living soul..." Naturally, Adam was never "born" from a woman, so *gennaō* was not an option, but this and the Galatians 4 use of *ginomai* suggest that for Paul they are both in the realm of mythology. The very mythological hymn of Philippians 2 also uses *ginomai* in verse 7: "(KJV)...and was *made* in the likeness [*that pesky "likeness" again*] of men." This (as yet unnamed) descending deity undergoes no suggestion of "being born"—which term the KJV again avoids, though modern translations often do not. That verse of the hymn also introduces the idea of the descending deity taking on the "form of a slave," a concept in common with the 'enslavement' to the Law implied in Galatians 4. There is a commonality of thought through all

this, and it is anything but clearly related to earthly history. Contrast this with the Gospel writers who consistently use *gennaō* to express birth, including that of Jesus, as in Matthew 2:1: "After Jesus was born (*gennaō*) in Bethlehem of Judea..." Even John the Baptist, among those "born of woman" in Matthew 11:11 (following Q), undergoes that process courtesy of the verb *gennaō*. And Luke, of course, follows suit (1:35, 1:57, 7:28).

In the wider literature, we find a rare use of *ginomai* to signify "born," but in the vast majority of cases, it is *gennaō*. The Septuagint (LXX) has several occurrences of the phrase "born of woman," but to point these out in English (as Christopher Price on the IIDB has done) is irrelevant, since the critical question is: what verb is being used in the Greek? In cases like Job 14:1 and 25:4 or Sirach 10:18, it is *gennaō*, which only serves to highlight the difference from Galatians 4:4 and lead to the conclusion that Paul's divergence from the norm must mean something. If it is claimed that "born of woman" is an idiomatic phrase in the Hebrew Bible (with which Paul was certainly familiar), why did he alter that idiom and substitute a different verb in not one but two places when he referred to Jesus' supposed human birth? In any case, when a key word in an idiom is changed, it is no longer the idiom.

In those few places in the LXX where *ginomai* is used for 'birth' there is a definite distinction in its context, as in Tobit 8:6: "Thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve his wife for a helper and stay; of them came (*ginomai*) mankind." Here the thought is a general "arising from" rather than individual birth. And in 1 Esdras 4:16: "Women [*speaking in general*] have borne the king and all the people that bear rule by sea and land." While neither of these cases is mythological in a Platonic context, there is a subtle affinity with Paul's two usages, and it does not entail a specific birth in recent history.

Thus, Muller and others have overlooked the most critical distinction of all between the "born of woman" of Galatians 4:4 and the "born of woman" in the allegory of Galatians 4:21f, and indeed in all other places: Paul's refusal to use the normal verb for human birth in the former, even though he and everyone else was quite comfortable using it in all other instances. In any case, claiming that the meaning of a word or phrase in one place must govern its meaning in all other places is a common apologetic fallacy, and fails to take into account differing circumstances and the evolution of ideas. We can extend that fallacy to the objection that since the myths of the savior gods (such as Dionysos in regard to being born of a human woman) meant one thing at an earlier time, it had to have the same meaning and application at all later times. Plutarch's presentation of the different ways of interpreting the myth of Osiris, both earthly and spiritually in Middle Platonic fashion, with his relegation of the earthly version to the realm of mythical allegory, discredits this argument. The fact that the idea of Dionysos being born of a woman (and note I have never said that the literature uses this specific phrase of him) was formulated at a time when this was believed literally, does not preclude that at some later time such literalness had evolved to myth and allegory.

These five points create a strong impediment to those who would declare that Galatians 4:4 sounds a death knell for the mythicist case. In fact, forming a coherent picture as they do, in conformity with so much else that we find expressed in the New Testament epistles, they can be said to contribute in a positive manner to the conclusion that Paul and the other early epistle writers believed only in a mythical Jesus.

Giving Birth to the Messiah

But that's not the end of it. Earlier, in regard to Romans 1, the question was asked, is it *possible* Paul could have conceived of his Christ, a spiritual being in the spiritual world, as bearing some kind of relationship to David, regardless of how he might have understood it? That question was answered positively, through an appeal to Platonic philosophy and to Paul's stated derivation of his gospel about the Son as being from scripture. (Again, let me reiterate that this does not entail Paul believing that the *spiritual* Christ was a literal descendant of the *earthly* David, so

challenges to come up with some other example of such an admittedly bizarre idea are not applicable.) A similar question needs to be asked about Galatians 4:4. Is it *possible* that early Christians like Paul could accept Christ as "born of woman" in an entirely mythological setting, regardless of how they might understand it? The answer to that question is equally positive. Not only can we extend the appeal to Platonic philosophy and to possible scriptural derivation (namely Isaiah 7:14), we can find an example of such thinking right within the New Testament itself. (This is something I had previously overlooked, until, much to my chagrin, my attention was called to it by a correspondent.)

I have in the past pointed out that certain deities in savior god mythology were spoken of as having been born of woman, as for example Dionysos. Critics have countered that such myths were placed on earth and not in the heavens, and that the 'woman' was regarded as having actually lived, even if in the context of primordial legend. This is true—originally. But as Platonic philosophy took hold through the Hellenistic period, such myths became transplanted to a spirit dimension, even while keeping much of their original expression as rooted in a distant earthly past. This evolution of myth can be seen in one of the documents of the New Testament: the Book of Revelation. The Apocalypse of John contains a wealth of mythology derived from a wide spectrum of ancient myths both Jewish and pagan. And virtually all of it is placed in the heavens. Like those visionary ascents to the spiritual realms so common during the period, such as in Daniel, the Ascension of Isaiah and the Similitudes of Enoch, Revelation has moved its mythology from earth to heaven, from the material to the spiritual. The myth we need to consider here is that of chapter 12:

"1. And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun... 2. and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.... 5. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and to his throne..." [NASB]

Commentators like John Sweet (*Revelation*, p.193f) and R. Beasley-Murray (*The Book of Revelation*, p.192f), have identified the background to the mythology of chapter 12. Sweet says: "It is widely agreed that the story told in chapter 12 represents a Jewish-Christian adaptation of what can only be described as an international myth, current throughout the world of John's day. No single tradition can account for all the features of the chapter." A primary source seems to be the Greek myth of the birth of Apollo from the goddess Leto, but elements of the Babylonian creation myth are also present, along with Persian and Egyptian features. As well, the woman and child represent longstanding Jewish themes: the woman as "the ideal glorified Israel" (Sweet), as "Mother Zion bringing forth the messianic Deliverer of God's suffering people" (Beasley-Murray). No matter how one wishes to interpret the mythical imagery of Revelation, it is representative of ancient mythological thought, and it has nothing to do with history, let alone the Mary and Jesus of the Gospels.

And how pathetic it is to see commentators like Sweet and Beasley-Murray twist the text into knots, wringing these verses like a wet rag, in an attempt to squeeze from them some drop of history, some distillation of the Gospels, on which they could be based. According to Sweet (p.195), "The whole life of Jesus from conception to ascension is condensed in these few words [*caught up to God*]." "It may seem strange," he says, "that his death and resurrection, normally the centre of the story, are not actually mentioned, but John is writing for the church, which knows it..." Beasley-Murray goes further, throwing rationality to the wind (p.199-200): "Not a few expositors maintain that since it was impossible for a Christian to represent Jesus as exalted to heaven as soon as he was born, the 'birth' must be interpreted as the death and resurrection of Jesus....(John) is content to let the narrative of the deliverer's birth and rapture to heaven stand without modification, for his readers were all aware that Jesus, prior to his ascension, had a life

and ministry among men, and experienced a death and resurrection." Well, if the "church" *were* aware of such things, it was certainly not through the channels of any non-Gospel writing of this period, for they are all, including Revelation, silent on such events on earth from start to finish. When a passage can be made to "stand for" anything which the commentator wishes to read into it, silence and contrary meaning obviously evaporate as a difficulty. Unfortunately, this is the methodology of much of New Testament scholarship and is a measure of the seriousness and honesty which has been applied to dealing with the mythicist case.

The vocabulary of Revelation 12 includes neither *gennaō* nor *ginomai* (the words used instead relate to *tiktō*, to bear), but this is the birth of a divine child from a "woman" taking place in a mythical context, and whether it is pure allegory or an expression of common mythological thinking, there is nothing by which we can make a clear distinction between this "born of woman" and that of Galatians 4. More than the allegory of 4:21f, and regardless of the issue of vocabulary, this scene in the Book of Revelation provides undeniable support for a purely mythological interpretation of Paul's "born of woman."

(The correspondent I mentioned above who pointed out my blind spot in regard to Revelation 12 was James Barlow, who submitted an essay on the Doherty-Muller debate containing some interesting reflections on the mythicist case and "born of woman." I have included an edited version here: "Realizing the Mythicist Case: Doherty vs. Muller")

Marcion and the Option for Interpolation

Finally, let's survey the option that "born of woman, born under the Law" is an interpolation, a view that some radical scholars hold. It could well be, though I tend to shy away from taking the easy way out here and prefer to argue along the preceding lines. The main argument in this regard is based on a comparison of the canonical and Marcionite versions of Galatians. In the latter, those key phrases in Galatians 4:4 are missing. Did Marcion excise them, or were they added later by an ecclesiastical editor? Christopher Price on the IIDB said this:

We know that Marcion mutilated Paul's letters and mutilated Luke. Moreover, we know that one of Marcion's most important targets was anything suggesting Jesus was a human being or was born. This is why he removed the first two chapters of Luke. It's also why he removed Galatians 4.4. No such references could be allowed....And Matthew's birth narrative was widely circulated prior to Marcion.

Well, we don't "know" that Marcion mutilated Luke and Paul's letters. That's the main issue under debate in regard to Marcion's use of Luke and Paul. Some scholars have concluded the opposite, that the first two chapters of Luke were not present in the version used by Marcion, which could well have been an Ur-Luke. It is certainly true that Marcion would not have liked certain passages in the Luke we have, but if there were as many as we find in the canonical version, and if the Lukan Gospel had been linked with an already written Acts of the Apostles, it becomes doubtful that Marcion would have been attracted to using Luke at all. Scholars blithely declare that Marcion made these wholesale deletions from Luke, but if the latter was a well-known Gospel by his time, it would surely have been difficult to get away with such mutilations. As for Price's claim that Matthew's birth narrative was widely circulated prior to Marcion, I have no knowledge of any evidence on which this is based.

Quotations were made on the IIDB regarding arguments for "born of woman, born under the law" as a 2nd century post-Marcion Catholic redaction, but those taken from the Dutch Radical Van Manen I found of mixed efficacy. Von Manen finds a particular difficulty in the apparent contradiction that Galatians 4 has Christ *already* under the "curse" of the Law from birth, yet he

becomes a "cursed thing" only by mounting the cross in Galatians 3. I find this somewhat forced as an incompatibility (it's holding a letter writer to far too strict a standard), and in any case it is fairly easily absorbed within the mythicist scenario. Von Manen's strongest argument is based on the grammatical nature of the phrase, in that the "born" participle is in the aorist, implying that these characteristics of the Son—born of woman and born under the Law—were already existing when he was "sent." Von Manen put this down to a miscalculation by a later editor who didn't appreciate the anomaly he was creating, but in fact this observation is fully supportive of a Pauline origin *within the mythicist scenario*. Since God is sending only the "spirit" of his Son at the present time, and the two "*legomenon*" features are mythical, then they were indeed in effect prior to the present "sending" of the Son—which was not a birth at all in the historical sense. Thus the interpolation option is at best only a possibility and cannot, in my view, be convincingly demonstrated.

Before leaving "born of woman," we should note another interesting observation made by Michael Turton on IIDB:

Bernard's argument further demands that we take the meaning of "sons" in Galatians 4 to be historical when it refers to Jesus, but allegorical when it refers to humans. In fact Gal 4 is one long allegory on Abraham, sonship, and the Law. Note that Paul uses "according to the flesh" here in a symbolic sense. Abraham has two sons, both by human women, and both born by sexual intercourse and a trip down the birth canal. But he distinguishes them by their relationship to the Law...

- *23 But he [that was] of the maid servant was born according to flesh, and he [that was] of the free woman through the promise.*

Turton points out that, according to the orthodox view, Jesus is the historical and literal son of a woman, while believers who have become "sons" are only symbolically so. In a context of so much allegory, the former half of that contrast is out of character, and sticks out like a sore thumb. (Compare this to the situation in Romans 1:2-4, in which Paul, though laying out a context which is thoroughly scriptural, is nevertheless claimed to be inserting a piece of historical datum in calling Jesus "arising from David's seed.") Another important observation is the use of "*kata sarka*" here. Rather than a literal meaning, it must have a symbolic one, for Isaac was also "natural born" in the fleshly sense. The phrase's application to Ishmael signifies enslavement to the Law, while Isaac born "free" is equated with the children of the promise, namely Paul's readers, who are now free of the Law. This allegorical meaning shows that Paul could use *kata sarka* in many different ways, not all of them literal.

*

In the next two sections of his critique, Muller tackles my comments on "brother of the Lord" and Josephus. I have no intention of rehashing either of these subjects here. They have been done to death, and neither of them are resolvable. But they don't have to be. The mythicist option needs merely establish that, in the case of "the brother of the Lord" we can arrive at nothing but ambiguity, and in the case of Josephus we can never arrive at a position of reliability in regard to the claim that Josephus wrote something about an historical Jesus. Each one of us can decide on the relative strengths of both sides of the argument in either case, but neither Josephus nor Galatians 1:19 can be used to prove the existence of Jesus or discredit the mythicist option.

That being said, I will make a few comments on selected points raised on both subjects by Muller and Carrier.

The Brother of the Lord (Galatians 1:19)

Muller has nothing original to say in objecting to a reading of "the brother of the Lord" as referring to a fellow Christian or member of the sect. He can acknowledge that "brothers *in* the Lord" in Philippians 1:14 does indeed refer to fellow Christians, but the change of preposition from "in" to "of" allegedly renders Galatians 1:19 indubitably a reference to sibling. To his question,

If Paul wanted to express James was a Christian, why didn't he write "James, brother **in** the Lord"?

Carrier replies:

Because Greek is a very rich language, and Paul often changes idiom. It is the same ambiguity in 1 Corinthians 9:5. But I agree that Doherty needs to adduce for us more clear cases that prove the idiom in use within the first two centuries.

I'd love to, but I can't pull corroboration out of a hat. There are many things in the early Christian literature we don't possess parallels for in other areas. This does not preclude us from doing our best to make deductions based on what we have. I postulated that the Jerusalem sect around James could have referred to itself as "brothers of/in the Lord." Muller ridiculed the idea, claiming (on no known grounds) that this would have been understood by their fellow Jews as "brother of Yahweh," something that would have been sacrilegious. And he compared it with the case of Caligula:

Note: the closest equivalent of that title, as related in ancient writings, is one that Caius (Caligula) attributed to himself:

*Josephus' Ant., XIX, I, 1, "He also Asserted His Own Divinity, and insisted on greater honors to be paid him by his subjects than are due to mankind. He also frequented that temple of Jupiter which they style the Capitol, which is with them the most holy of all their temples, and **Had Boldness Enough** to call himself **The Brother Of Jupiter.**"*

Maybe a self-deified Roman emperor could claim being the brother of a god (and survive for a while!), but what about a regular Jew regarding God, in Jerusalem? Simply preposterous.

What is "preposterous" is to claim that anyone, Jew or otherwise, would think that a group calling itself "brothers of the Lord" meant that they were calling themselves *siblings* of God. Such a name would simply be interpreted as signifying membership in a brotherhood devoted to God. How Muller in all seriousness can come up with such bizarre straw men and think that this constitutes scholarly rebuttal is a genuine mystery.

Further on, Earl makes an argument from silence (as he is well known to do a lot!): because James is not said to be Jesus' sibling in [*the epistle of*] 'James', Christians then did not know about it!

This in fact is a very valid argument from silence which cannot be so disdainfully dismissed. That two pseudonymous authors—writing in famous apostles' names in order to enhance the authority of their forgeries—would fail to identify both James and Jude as siblings of Jesus himself can scarcely be comprehended. This is a classic case of the legitimate usage of the argument from silence: having powerful reasons to expect mention of something, and we don't get it. This silence has vexed several scholars who have offered exceedingly lame 'explanations' for it (see Note 27 in *The Jesus Puzzle*).

And, as in an act of desperation, in note 26 (p.335) Doherty suggests a Christian interpolation....This is the first reference of "James" in 'Galatians'. But at the time (around 38) of Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (as narrated in Gal1:18-20) there was another prominent member of the "church of Jerusalem" named James, the brother of John, who got executed around 42 (according to Ac12:1-2). Therefore, Paul probably wanted to identify the "James" he met then, more so because this one became most important later.

Muller has inadvertently provided the very reason why a later scribe could have felt impelled to insert an identification for James in Galatians 1:19, namely because he believed that there was another James on the scene and he feared that the reader of Paul might be confused as to which one was being referred to. I say "later" because in the early epistles there is no evidence for a "James, brother of John." In fact, Paul a number of times refers to a John, but never to a brother of his by any name. The interpolation would have been made at a time—probably in the latter 2nd century—when the original James had come to be regarded as the sibling of Jesus, and the inserted phrase, meaning "sibling," was one that was currently applied to him. It would have been very natural for a copyist to add "the brother of the Lord" to the text or as a gloss in the margin (later inserted into the text), in order to differentiate James the Just from James brother of John.

For a fuller discussion of Galatians 1:19, see my Reader Feedback 22, response to Gerry.

Josephus' Testimony

Both Muller and Carrier had a fair amount to say about Josephus, but it was confined to the smaller reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20. Surprisingly, Muller declares agreement with me that the longer Testimonium in *Antiquities* 18 is entirely spurious. This, however, creates problems for regarding "the brother of Jesus, him called the Christ" attached to James in chapter 20 as fully genuine, chief of them being that if Josephus had nowhere else referred to Jesus, or to the "Christ," this reference would be unintelligible to the vast majority of his readers. Muller claims:

The audience of Josephus in the 90's, the educated Romans, were most likely aware of Christians, which term is derived from "Christ", the later being known as (at least) the (alleged) founder of the sect. Certainly Tacitus and Pliny the younger, writing some fifteen years after Josephus did (93), were aware of that. Furthermore, Nero's persecution against them, about thirty years before, was certain to make the Christians well known.

Fifteen years is a long time (actually it was closer to 25), and Tacitus' alleged knowledge of Christians could have been of recent vintage, dependent on newly-circulating hearsay in Rome by and about Christians and their reputed founder. (Some scholars regard this as likely the source of Tacitus' information; for example, Norman Perrin in his *The New Testament: An Introduction*, p.407.) There is also the question of whether the Tacitus passage is genuine. A persecution by Nero tied to the great fire of 64 CE is not mentioned by Christian commentators for centuries, a very perplexing silence. As for Pliny, he knows surprisingly little about Christians, according to his letter to Trajan (if *that* is genuine as well). Carrier remarks on Muller's claim that educated Romans were aware of Christians:

This is disproved by Pliny's letter to Trajan—both of them certainly very in-the-know, yet both seem largely clueless about Christians. Pliny had to torture some female Deacons even to find what the religion was about (and Tacitus probably got his information from Pliny). And that was in 110 A.D. It is certainly not the case that Josephus would assume his readers knew what he was talking about. Before the turn of the century, most wouldn't.

When Muller pans my suggestion that "a man named James" could have stood on its own in *Antiquities* 20 (without the entire phrase "the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ") Carrier somewhat agrees:

That is actually very unlikely on the Greek as we have it. As it stands, it is grammatically *impossible*. Though it is possible a scribe changed the grammar, that would be very unusual, because the phrase is unusual (lit. "for him the name was James")—and as a rule, scribes don't change their text to make it more difficult or complex, but almost always to make it simpler. And there would be no need to change it for an interpolation.

I'm not sure I follow Carrier's line of argument here. It is immaterial what scribes do "as a rule" in other situations, especially those in which interpolations are not involved. Here, if the scribe had to alter the grammar in order to make the interpolation, he would do so in whatever way was necessary; as well, we have no way of knowing if he was also forced to drop one or more words. Thus, Carrier cannot really tell whether or not there was a need to change the phrase "whose name was James" in order to insert the reference to Jesus.

Muller traps himself in an "I want it both ways" situation. He claims that the interpolator of the "lost reference" copied the (genuine) phrase in *Antiquities* 20 "for the sake of making his bit look authentic!" And yet he has also argued that the similarity of phraseology to other quotations from Josephus makes the reference in chapter 20 authentic. The point is, as Muller declares in his first remark, interpolators who regularly copy the works of any writer are quite capable of mimicking their style, so any argument for authenticity based on conformity of style is accordingly rendered invalid.

Based on his grammatical argument above, Carrier is very confident that Josephus wrote "the brother of Jesus, by the name Jacob." And he could be right, especially as he regards this "Jesus" not as the Jesus of the Christians, but as some other Jesus whom Josephus has already named—and there have been many of them. This is an idea that G. A. Wells has voiced, and it would explain why so little is said about him, and nothing about any connection with a Christian sect. It simply was not James the Just Josephus was talking about. I would add that, in this case, the inserted phrase "the one called Christ" would most likely have been a marginal gloss added by a scribe who did think Josephus was referring to the Christian Jesus (and James) and wanted to make this clear—the same motive and process I suggested earlier in regard to "the brother of the Lord" in Galatians 1:19. As a gloss, this would not have been the place or occasion to add more information about Jesus, laudatory or otherwise.

Muller concludes, and I'll let Michael Turton respond:

I do not think Doherty, despite all his efforts, is convincing against the authenticity of the combined mention of Jesus' brother in Galatians 4:4 and Josephus' *Antiquities*, XX, IX, 1. Even if, at some points, he can raise some doubts. It looks Doherty, as usual, is agenda-driven and trying to eradicate any blood brother because that would prove a human Jesus. Let's also note that Josephus was living in Jerusalem around 62, where and when James was tried & stoned.

Accusing someone making an argument of being "agenda-driven" is an act of rhetorical desperation. I quite agree that it is a strong point that Josephus was living around Jerusalem in 62 when James was handed over for stoning (Josephus nowhere says James was actually killed). Unfortunately for Bernard, that strength runs against his position: if Josephus really knew James and his position, why doesn't he ever mention Christians and Christianity in his many discussions of messianic pretenders?

....But it is apparent that Bernard's arguments are weak indeed; they are 90% rhetoric, and include blatant errors of interpretation, as well as historicist biases and assumptions that render them impotent against Doherty.

I would direct the reader to my lengthy article on all these aspects of the Josephus question, including the longer Testimonium Flavianum: Josephus Unbound.

Revisiting Hebrews

As the final section of his critique, Muller revisits Hebrews to "examine Doherty's arguments for every occurrence of a human-like Jesus..." His argumentation reaches a new low, and it is truly enough to make one run off screaming into the night. One of the reasons I did not address Mr. Muller's 'case' against *The Jesus Puzzle* before this was because I felt that its chaotic and incompetent nature would be so evident that no one would pay it any heed. I was eventually persuaded that this was unfortunately not the case by those who urged me to respond. Consider this passage:

Heb2:3 NASB "how will we escape if we neglect so great **A Salvation**? After it was at the **First Spoken Through The Lord** ["which **First** (= originally) received/taken (as) spoken **Through** (= by) the Lord"], it was **Confirmed To Us By Those Who Heard**,"

Note: the translation in brackets seems the most accurate, if not elegant.

On Chapter 13, page 129, Doherty comments "Jesus would hardly have taught the unique christology contained in this epistle." But since when the mention of 'a salvation' means the whole christology of 'Hebrews'? Let's note Earl quotes "'For **This Salvation** was first announced through the Lord" [based on the NEB]", but "**This Salvation**" (which, for Earl, seems of the same "scenario" as the one in the letter) is NOT in the Greek! So Jesus may have spoken of "a salvation", period. Later, the author of 'Hebrews' "explained" how and why it got "enabled" (through the crucifixion and the "sacrifice", the later "demonstrated" from scriptures taken out of context!

What the NEB has done is simply substitute "this salvation" for the "it" of the second sentence to clarify the antecedent. Is Muller denying that the "it" refers back to the "salvation" of the first sentence? Is he saying that by inserting the word "this," the NEB (and myself by quoting it) have foisted an invalid or misleading meaning on the sentence? It would seem so, for he is claiming that I am reading the NEB's "this salvation" as referring to the "whole christology" of Hebrews, whereas if it were rendered (more accurately?) as "a salvation" it would not. What can one do with argumentation like this? It is almost too grotesque to get one's mind around. In any case, I *would* argue that the salvation spoken of—in either sentence 1 or sentence 2—*does* include the whole christology of the epistle. That is the author's concern in Hebrews: to lay out this christology and impress it upon his readers. Why would he *not* have it in mind in making this statement about the original message, no matter where it came from? No believer would ever think or admit that the philosophy of his sect did *not* go back to its genesis; this is a universal characteristic of all sects after a certain amount of time has passed. The author begins chapter 2 by saying: "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away," and he goes on for eleven more chapters arguing the validity of what was "heard" at the group's formation and since passed on. (I have demonstrated in Supplementary Article No. 7 that this refers to a revelatory experience from God and not to the teaching of Jesus in an earthly ministry.) Muller argues that the "great salvation" is simply to be taken as Jesus promising "a salvation" without specifics, with the author of Hebrews filling in the blanks later from his own idiomatic reading of scripture—all of this tortured argumentation designed to get around my remark about Jesus not teaching the unique christology of the epistle.

Then Doherty remarks "in fact, the voice of Jesus teaching on earth is never heard in 'Hebrews'; everything the Son "says" comes from the scriptures." I agree with Doherty, but that does not take away Jesus spoke about salvation (generally), even if the author did not care about the specifics.

Apparently, silence for Muller evaporates as a difficulty too, for the silence on Jesus' earthly voice is all explainable by the author not "caring" about the specifics—even in chapter 2, when he wishes to show that Jesus regarded all men as his brothers, and he draws on exclusively biblical sayings to illustrate this, despite having several usable sayings in the Christian oral tradition (if we are to trust the Gospels). Here, too, scholars are vexed for explanations of this strange situation.

And Jesus **Speaking** "in the days of his flesh" is mentioned in:

Heb5:7 Darby "Who **In The Days Of His Flesh**, having offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him out of death, with strong **Crying And Tears**; (and having been **Heard** because of his piety;)"

By that time (more so after reading my first page), I think my readers will agree that "in the days of his flesh" relates to a Jesus on earth (and not in Doherty's heaven!). And here, Jesus **Speaks** and is **Heard** (this time allegedly to/by God).

Difficulties evaporate, too, when one simply ignores—right in the text which one is critiquing—the arguments put forward in support of my position. Note 59 of *The Jesus Puzzle* points out that the content of what Jesus has done "in the days of his flesh" (the supplications and entreaties with cries and tears) is taken from scripture—according to more than one scholar. Just as the "voice" of the Son, which Hebrews places in such prominence, is taken exclusively from scripture, so too does 5:7 indicate a mythological outlook on what the Son has done "in the days of his flesh." Finding every feature accorded to the Son solely in scripture, with nothing drawn from history (not even in the opening chapters when the author proves the Son superior to the angels) should do anything but make Muller confident that his readers will "agree" that Jesus is an entity who was recently on earth, with a wealth of historical tradition now attached to him.

*And here is something that Earl does not address in his book, about a very human Jesus: Heb2:14-18 Darby "Since therefore the children [Christians/"brethren", according to 2:12-13] partake [Greek perfect tense: should read "partook"] of **Blood And Flesh**, **He** [Jesus] **Also, In Like Manner** [paraplēsiōs], **Took Part In The Same** [Jesus was as much flesh & blood as the contemporary Christians. An unequivocal confirmation follows:], ... Wherefore it behoved **Him In All Things To Be Made Like To** [his] **Brethren**, ... , to make propitiation for the sins of the people; for, in that himself **Has Suffered** [Greek second perfect: the suffering is over with!], being **Tempted**, he is able to help **Those** that are being **Tempted** [on earth!]."*

*Note: in 4:15 Darby "For we have not a high priest not able to sympathize with our infirmities, but **Tempted** [Greek perfect tense] **In All Things In Like Manner** ... ", Jesus has already been tempted.*

*And where would this "testing" (**The Same As The One Affecting Earthlies!**) have been? In the demonic fleshy mid-world (between heaven and earth) or the highest heaven? Or on earth, known for its "flesh and blood" "brethren", subjected to temptations (similar of the ones faced by a human Christ in the past)?*

Of course, Muller here has missed the entire dimension of paradigmatic parallel (which I discuss in my book in connection with other passages), which the passage he quotes fits to a "T". And he fails to be perturbed by all those references to "likeness" and "similarity" which ought to be unnecessary and redundant. (Note that the word "paraplēsiōs" means 'similar to,' not 'identical.'

Thus Muller is going beyond the wording itself in deducing that "Jesus was as much flesh & blood as the contemporary Christians.") The author is even describing the paradigmatic system of salvation when he says that all this partaking of like qualities and experiences is what enables Christ to "make propitiation" and to "help" those on earth.

Michael Turton commented on the above passage:

Again, the problem remains despite rhetorical questions. Where did the temptation take place? On earth? Then why is there no example or context for this "temptation"? The author of Hebrews is not averse to giving examples -- in the next chapter he talks about Moses, discusses "hardening of hearts" and then gives a historical example -- it happened in the wilderness! Similarly, in 8:5 Moses again appears, and again the time and context of the event are given. Hebrews 11 is one long list of concrete events in the Old Testament. "By faith....." he keeps repeating. This, of course, is yet another silence, for Hebrews does not refer to even a single event in the NT where faith is prominent -- for example, the woman with the menstrual problem who heals herself just by touching Jesus, the centurion of Matthew 8:10 -- a really potent case, for Jesus avers that this gentile beats all the Jews in faith, the paralytic of Matthew 9, the next healing of the daughter in Matthew 11, the blind man in Mark 10...the list is long, and all are ignored by Hebrews. Why? The pattern is clear. Hebrews does not know this story.

Finally, let's wonder where Jesus would have been an apostle, more so when all other "apostles" in the NT lived on earth. Heb 3:1 Darby "... consider **The Apostle** and High Priest of our confession, **Jesus**"

The author explained (at length!) how Jesus became "High Priest" (by the sacrifice of himself), but did not about "Apostle", likely because it was already known....

Once again, Muller imposes a universal definition and usage on a word. And what of Jesus as "High Priest"? The entire discussion of this identification places Jesus as High Priest *in heaven*. He performs his duty as High Priest *in heaven*. The sacrifice was one made in the *heavenly sanctuary*. Whatever the author has in mind by calling Jesus an "Apostle," there is no impediment to seeing this characterization as having a heavenly application, just as the term "High Priest" does.

And to whom would he have preached?

To Jews, according to Paul:

*Ro 15:8 Darby "For I [Paul] say that **Jesus Christ Became a Minister** ['diakonos'] of [the] circumcision [Jews] for [the] truth of God, ..."*

*Note: "became" (root 'ginomai') can be translated as "came to pass" or "happened" (according to Strong). The verb is in the **Greek Perfect Tense**; therefore the action has been completed in the past.*

From my Reader Feedback No. 18:

"...Romans 15:8-9. But standard translations tend to read more into these verses than is evidently there. Is Paul saying that Christ ministered to the Jews? Literally, the wording is: "Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs." Is this a reference to an earthly ministry? Who knows, with such a cryptic statement? In fact, the verb/participle is in the perfect tense, *has become*, which has a 'present' ongoing implication. Paul could simply be saying that the spiritual Christ, operating in heaven, is now servant to the Jews, working on their behalf and for the conversion of the gentile. This is pretty weak stuff to support an historical Jesus."

Apparently Muller's understanding of English grammar is no better than his understanding of Greek grammar. The essential characteristic of the perfect tense in both languages is that it depicts an action which started in the past but has a continuing effect in the present. To say that "Christ has become a servant to the Jews" is primarily to make a statement about his *present* capacity. This focus on the present, on a Jesus who "is" an Apostle, a High Priest, a minister to his people, is fully in keeping with the universal outlook and expression of all the early Christian correspondence, canonical and otherwise, and in keeping with the blind eye turned on anything to do with the history of a recent Jesus of Nazareth.

Michael Turton had this comment on Muller's above passage:

Hello? Where does the passage in Hebrews say Jesus preached? Nowhere. Bernard has once again back-read the gospels into Hebrews. Calling Jesus an "apostle" does not mean that he actually preached. Further, 'Paul' -- or some early Christian -- tells us what an apostle is:

- *2 Corinthians 12:12 The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance.*

In other words, Jesus is an apostle because he provided us with signs, wonders, and miracles, not because he preached. Bernard's thrust has once more gone astray.

I will let Turton continue to carry the ball in regard to Muller's subsequent remarks:

*Heb7:14 Darby "For **It Is Clear** that our Lord has **Sprung Out Of Juda** [as David], as to which **Tribe** Moses spake nothing as to priests."*
*Doherty comments on that **Through Note** 44, on page 340.*

Earl starts by saying the statement is drawn from scriptures and therefore is not historical. But does someone claimed to be (truly or through scriptures) "sprung" from an Israelite tribe (or David, or Abraham) preclude the past existence of that person? Of course not. As a matter of fact, here, the author has Jesus ("our Lord") as an earthly human being, as for every descendant from any Israelite tribe.

*Once again we have the negative rhetorical back-reading of the gospels into Hebrews. "...But does someone claimed to be (truly or through scriptures) "sprung" from an Israelite tribe (or David, or Abraham) preclude the past existence of that person? Of course not." Bernard is right. It does not preclude past existence. However, **it does not establish it**, which is what Bernard claims Hebrews is doing. Doherty's point is that Jesus' descent is indicated clearly in the scriptures relied upon by the early Christians. Therefore, Jesus' descent is derived from the OT. Ipso facto, Hebrews cannot be used here as evidence of Jesus' real existence. Bernard's subsequent discussion of "prodelos" is simply idle chit-chat unrelated to the topic at hand. He has failed to adduce any positive evidence that Hebrews knows the descent of Jesus out of some historical understanding rather than OT midrash. He has simply adduced his historicist bias, and appealed to our unconscious sharing of historicist assumptions.*

Doherty writes: "there is no appeal to historical facts, or apostolic traditions concerning Jesus of Nazareth, no reference to Joseph and Mary, no mention of his lineage ..."
This is typical of Earl, who presupposes every reference to a human-like Jesus should come with many details attached. But why would the author digress on that here? His purpose is to demonstrate Jesus was not from the tribe normally assigned the priesthood,

the Levites, as Doherty points out: "The point is, Christ must be of a new line in order to create a new order of priesthood." And why should more details be supplied when 'Jesus from the tribe of Judah' is already "manifest"? More so if Jesus, as a descendant of David (and father Jesse), was already "known" by Christians (see Ro1:3 & Ro15:12)! Let's note here the author "explained" many things in the epistle, such as Jesus was pre-existent, the Son of God and, above all, performed the ultimate Sacrifice for sins (all of that new for his audience, according to Heb6:1-3). But the "manifest" descendance from the tribe of Judah comes out of the blue and is never "demonstrated": in all likelihood, the writer knew it was already allowed by his audience.

Bernard at last makes an argument in the last sentence of this passage: "...it is very likely the writer knew that was already accepted by his audience." This is simple speculation. Bernard also writes dismissively: "This is typical of Earl, who presupposes every reference to a human-like Jesus should come with many details attached." But why not? We see that whenever Hebrews refers to other humans -- Moses -- it frequently supplies details and examples. Of Jesus we get nothing. Moreover, adding Paul in support of Hebrews cannot help Bernard, for if Jesus' ancestry is midrash in Hebrews, it is midrash in Paul as well -- Doherty's entire point! Piling on quotes doth not an argument make. Bernard needs to show that some other route than OT proof-texting is the origin of this idea.

Finally, Bernard notes that Hebrews explained many things. But the examples given are all things that happened in Doherty's lower heaven. Not one is a thing said to have happened on earth -- despite the fact that Hebrews has no trouble giving details of life on earth for Joseph of Moses of the OT. Those were real people to him. Clearly, Jesus was not. Despite the lack of detail, Bernard considers these passages "damaging." The reality is that Doherty in Bernard's hands looks like the gorgeous assistant of a knife thrower in a circus, with knives everywhere around her but none in her flesh.

Heb9:26 Darby "But **Now Once** in the consummation of the ages he **Has Been Manifested** [Greek **Perfect Tense**] **For** [the] putting away of sin by his **Sacrifice**."

In chapter 3, page 37, Doherty comments on the verse: "the author of Hebrews also uses *phaneroo* ("manifest") in speaking to what has happened **In The Present Time**." He goes on "... a whole range of Christians writers would consistently use this sort of language to speak of **Christ's Coming In The Present Time** ..."

But "**Has Been Manifested**" is in the **Greek Perfect Tense** and consequently this action happened and was completed in the past! And not too long ago because of "**Now**"! Other actions about Jesus depicted in 'Hebrews' with verbs in the (Greek) perfect tense include: sufferance (2:18), temptation (4:15), separation from sinners (7:26), opposition from sinners (12:3) and perfection (unto others) through the "sacrifice", "**For By One Offering he Has Perfected** in perpetuity the sanctified" (10:14 Darby).

Once again, Muller misunderstands the perfect tense, stating an incomplete and misleading definition. The perfect is not primarily concerned with signifying a completed act in the past, which by itself would normally be expressed with the aorist. The essential reason for using the perfect is to emphasize a continuing result in the present. ("My son has been made a lieutenant" is concerned with his present status, not with the past when where or how of that promotion.) To say that something has been "completed" in the past is significantly erroneous, because it ignores the "continuing-in-the-present" dimension. Thus, the use of the perfect here is meant to elucidate a present state of affairs, with no specific nature conferred on the time or place of its initiation. Also, as Turton says:

Once again we detour into a discussion of what the Greek means. Bernard manages to write a whole paragraph on verb tenses without ever once considering what the verb "manifesting" means! How is it that Jesus is "manifest?" Why not "walked on earth" or better yet "born to Mary?" Why is such a vague verb used? Bernard's discussion simply goes right by that point. Whether it happened in the past or not is irrelevant -- the issue is where Jesus was manifest, and on that issue Hebrews is silent indeed.

Hebrews 8:4

As his final salvo, Muller attacks my analysis of the verse in Hebrews which I have called a "smoking gun," something which I maintain all but spells out that Jesus was never on earth. The problem is, Muller trains his cannons on only one aspect of the picture, and his caliber of ordinance is ineffective against the target.

Heb8:4-5a Darby "If then indeed he **Were** [Greek **Imperfect** tense] upon earth, he **Would Not even Be** [Imperfect] a priest, there **Being** [Greek **Present** tense] those who offer [Greek present tense] the gifts according to the law, (who **Serve** [present]...)"

*In Appendix 5, pages 310-312, Doherty calls it a "startling verse" because the imperfect tense in "he were" "is strictly a past tense" (as rendered by "if he had been on earth"). But he admits "the meaning is probably present, or at least temporally ambiguous, much like the conditional sense in which most other translations render it [as quoted]". That does not prevent Doherty to go into his usual speculations, some founded on argument from silence, such as the author should have specified "now" (but did not!). That leads him to say: "making the statement at all **Seems** to preclude the idea that Jesus had ever performed a sacrifice in the earthly realm." (back to where he started!). I'll counteract that:*

*A) According to the overall context, Jesus "upon earth" is a supposition of an action happening at the same time as for the priests officiating in the temple, **In The Present** (relative to when the epistle was written).*

First of all, this is not correct. To claim that the "if...would be" comparison is thought of exclusively as meaning *in the present* is not at all established by the context. This is the issue under debate, and to simply declare it the way one would wish it to be is begging the question. In fact, it is grammatically incorrect to imply that it must have a present context. But don't take my word for it. This is what Paul Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, p.405) has to say:

"The second difficulty concerns the meaning of the two occurrences of *ēn*. The imperfect in unreal conditions is temporally ambiguous, so that NEB [*which is the translation I quote in The Jesus Puzzle*] "Now if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest" (so Attridge) is grammatically possible. [*So much for Muller's declaration. Then Ellingworth goes on, and note the basis for his reasoning: the preconception that Jesus had been on earth, which forces him to judge the situation according to that preconception.*] However, it goes against the context, in at least apparently excluding Christ's present ministry, and it could also be misunderstood as meaning that Jesus had never 'been on earth.' Most versions accordingly render: 'If he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all'."

The "context" for Ellingworth is the Gospel story, as he admits. We can see right here a prime example of how the Gospels are read into the epistles, even when the language of the epistle fails to justify it. In any case, Ellingworth has noted that the construction in 8:4 is temporally ambiguous and admits the grammatical possibility of the NEB translation, so Muller's

subsequent exercise in offering several examples of the "if...would" construction in an attempt to demonstrate a solely present meaning is an exercise in futility. What Muller needs to do is to read more widely in New Testament scholarship, rather than charging off in his own direction, driven by his conviction of infallibility.

Now, this does not mean that one could *not* read the 8:4 phrase in the present tense. In fact, I state right in the Appendix Muller is addressing that "the meaning is probably present, or at least temporally ambiguous." That's my starting point, and to be more specific, I think the author had *both* past and present in mind. My argument does not rest on the phrase being meant solely in a past sense, as though I am claiming that the author is specifically declaring that Jesus was never on earth. Muller so often fixes on some aspect of my discussion and tears at it like a pitbull, while missing other elements and wider implications. This is the case here. He has gone no further than the question of the literal translation of two verbs, and then declares: "That should put to rest Doherty's speculations on the matter." In fact, my Appendix has several paragraphs analyzing the context of 8:4, arguing that the writer cannot have a past historical Jesus in his mind, all of which Muller simply ignores. The basics of that argument can be found in the Epilogue to my Supplementary Article No. 9 on Hebrews and in my Sound of Silence feature: Hebrews 8:4. To these I will add here some further comments I made in response to Richard Carrier's review of *The Jesus Puzzle*:

"I am not sure (nor are some scholars—see below) about the certainty with which Carrier makes his statement about the "*ei...an*" clause in Hebrews 8:4. Most cases would bear out the general principle that with an imperfect in both parts of the statement, the sense is of a present (contrafactual) condition; and that in conveying a past condition, the aorist would be used. But what of a *continuing* condition that extends from the past into the present? None of the aorist examples I can find convey that sense, only the sense of a specific condition limited to the past. What formula would be used to convey an ongoing condition, one existing for some time and still existing? I suggest it would be the one using the imperfect, which is a tense in itself that entails an ongoing quality. Thus an "*ei...an*" statement using the imperfect tense could in certain cases be ambiguous....

This ambiguity, entailing a condition extending back into the past, also makes sense in the context. I have asked why the writer would trouble to make a statement confined only to the present when in fact one part of the statement was supposedly contradicted by a recent past situation, and the reason now used to justify the statement itself also existed in that past situation. In other words, the "if he were on earth" clause is *contrafactual*, not true; yet it was supposedly very true in the recent past. No cognizance of this conflict is hinted at; the writer does not say something like "if he were *now* on earth." Then, the reason for the conditional statement itself, that "if he were on earth he would not be a priest," is implied as being because there are already priests here to do the job. But there were earthly priests in the past to do the job, including at the time when Jesus was supposedly on earth conducting his role as High Priest, which is Hebrews' central characterization of him. If he wouldn't be a priest "now" because there are human priests present on the scene, making him redundant or creating a conflict, why is it that he wasn't rendered redundant or in conflict in the recent past, when those same priests should have rendered him so? Why would the writer of Hebrews choose to make such a trivial statement applying to the present, when its very opposite was true in the much more important situation of the recent past?

Ellingworth goes on to state: "The argument presupposes, rather than states, that God cannot establish two priestly institutions in competition [that is, the earthly priests and Jesus as High Priest]." In fact, the passage as a whole stipulates that those earthly priests perform earthly duties and sacrifices, while Jesus the High Priest has his own duties and sacrifices, which chapters 8

and 9 place in a heavenly setting and category. Yet Ellingworth fails to perceive the contradiction involved, that the same conflict (between heavenly and earthly priests) would have existed in the recent past, something the writer of Hebrews should have been aware of and at the very least should have felt constrained to clarify."

*

Muller wraps up his critique with an overblown presentation of all the tired old explanations for why Paul and the other early writers are so silent on the historical Jesus: that he didn't care about the earthly man, that the epistles were "occasional" and anyway everyone already knew everything there was to know about the human Jesus (and of course there was no controversy among Christians anywhere on matters of faith and morality which would have necessitated appealing to what Jesus had said or done in his ministry). For Muller, there would have "no incentive for (Paul) to digress on a rather insignificant lower class Jew with a short public life in a small rural area," making one wonder how such an insignificant non-entity could have been turned into the transcendent Son Christ Jesus of the epistles, a point Muller does not address. Finally, Muller once again trots out his *pièce de résistance*: the absurdity of the whole idea of a "celestial fleshy realm" which no scholar today has ever heard of let alone accepts, a fantasy which apparently is my own invention entirely, a "lower heaven (which) would have generated storms of controversy" in ancient times. He concludes:

On these matters, Doherty either ignores, overlooks, doubts or harasses the primary evidence. He is prone to use inaccurate translations and biased "mythicist" interpretations, many on dubious latter texts, in order to claim his points. He cannot find half-decent attestations about belief in antiquity of a "lower fleshy heaven" (far from that!), so crucial for his position. To substitute for the lacks, Earl relies on rhetoric, agenda-driven dating, arguments from silence, assumptions and convoluted & largely unsubstantiated theories (with hypotheses stacked on each other!). Through such a horrific "methodology", the chances of him being right are insignificant.

So much confidence based on so much ignorance!

* * * * *

I hope the reader has been able to bear with me in this lengthy rebuttal to Bernard Muller's critique. The quality and tone of that critique has made it impossible to treat it in a thoroughly neutral manner, and there may be those reading this who will accuse me of an *ad hominem* approach. Yet I have tried to keep my rebuttal, as critical as it may have been, focused on Muller's own approach and arguments. They contravene so many principles of good scholarship, and in such a blatantly incompetent manner, that neutrality cannot do them justice. At the same time, as in all of my reviews and responses, my rebuttal to Muller has provided an opportunity to further enlarge on the mythicist case, to introduce fresh arguments and to give the reader some insight into the wider field of debate on the issue of the existence of an historical Jesus.

Addendum To Part Three

Review of Bernard Muller's critique by Jacob Aliet on the Internet Infidels Discussion Board

* * * * *

These are some comments on Bernard Muller's Review of Doherty's "The Jesus Puzzle".

Muller's long review addresses a few arguments in Doherty's thesis. To start off, wrt "Higher and Lower Worlds", Ascension of Isaiah alone is enough to show there were higher and lower worlds - Muller fails to deal with Doherty's arguments regarding the redaction of AoI, the evolution of Jesus that is evident via the redaction of AoI. He simply takes a tangent and beats it to death and wears down the hapless reader to nod tiredly in agreement.

Under "The higher world of Attis, Mithras and Osiris", in spite of the literalist reading out of historical context that Muller valiantly employs on the texts, he does present a few challenges to the interpretation of the relevant texts.

On "The rulers of this age" (archons), Muller basically picks the interpretation he prefers and avoids dealing with the arguments made by Doherty, or the problems with his preferred interpretation. This is deceptive. On "Descending gods", Php2:6-11 is unassailable so Muller scores no points there. He employs a gospel reading to Pauline epistles and misses the point from start to finish because he fails to shed off the gospel mindset. Muller's alternative hypothesis lacks explanatory power - for example, is it a coincidence that Paul failed to mention Joseph, Pilate, Mary and other historical details regarding Jesus? Why does Paul doggedly rely on revelation and the OT for teachings while never on Jesus? Why the silence regarding a HJ in extra-biblical sources?

Muller's review is also incomplete and he should perhaps have used an appendix to flesh out the details of his arguments, then make the arguments more concise. Muller fails to handle the second century writings that support Doherty's thesis. Muller instead dwells for an interminable length on Plutarch, Osiris, Mithras, archons, higher and lower worlds, Antiquities 20 and Pauline epistles.

He fails to handle arguments regarding Q (lack of Jewish voice in CST), he fails to address GThom, He fails to handle arguments regarding the intermediary son as found in *Shepherd of Hermas* and *Odes of Solomon*, Minucius Felix, second century silence, the writings of the apostolic fathers, the fact that almost every significant item in the gospels can be traced back to the OT and so on.

What Muller does is pick a few parts of Doherty's work and dwell on them at length while leaving out 'developmental' arguments. Its like someone breaking off one leg of a table then arguing that since there is no flat top attached to it and other legs for stability, its therefore just a piece of wood and not a leg of a table. Muller, for example, barely touches on the second century silence and uses that gap to make a rhetorical point:

Quote:

...three pages of convoluted rhetorical speculations leading to some mythical upper world, with nothing suggesting it was believed by anyone in the first three centuries.

Regarding Jesus being son of David, the very first Gospel (Mark) tells us Jesus was not the son of David. The genealogies in Luke and Matthew also clearly strain to fabricate a Davidic kinship for Jesus and they still get it wrong! We know that the latter evangelists were trying to historicize

prophecy.

A HJ materialized towards the end of the first century/early second century. In the second century, there was no consensus on a HJ as we see on the works of Minucius Felix, Epistle to Diognetus (that even goes further to say God never sent anyone on earth), Shepherd of Hermas, 1 Clement, Tatians Address to the Greeks and so on. In the early third century, Constantine converted, gnostic currents were stamped out of christianity, councils were held and documents destroyed.

Some people, like Paul, believed in a MJ - an incarnated god. Others, like the Shepherd of Hermas show belief in "the son" - an intermediary saviour figure. Redacted texts like Ascencion of Isaiah demonstrate to us how the figure of HJ evolved over time. How the demons (archons) were replaced later with the "ruler" and how the ruler later became Pilate. They show us how Christ became Jesus and how a tree became a cross. The Christian beliefs were varied and its false for Muller to claim that "nothing suggesting it [a mythical Jesus] was believed by anyone in the first three centuries"

Muller employ's empty rhetoric generously:

Quote:

...meandering fuzzy discussion...Doherty lacks accuracy...Doherty harasses the primary evidence...Doherty is prone to use inaccurate translations and biased "mythicist" interpretations, many on dubious latter texts, in order to claim his points...Doherty provided three pages of convoluted rhetorical speculations...

Muller uses Darby's translation, NASB and YLT - shuffling between them, picking one when it favours his argument, abandoning it when it doesn't. This is a shoddy method of argumentation.

Muller, who claims to be a humanist, uses phrases like 'non-Christian Sallustius', against sources that do not agree with his point. One wonders what "non-Christian" has to do with an early source - is the review written for a Christian audience?

Quote:

Doherty is unable to present any external evidence about his idea of the fleshy/demonic lower heaven as written before (or during) Paul's days.

Empedocles 492-432 BC "there exist daimones("souls"), divine beings that have fallen from a superior world into this world and exist clothed in the "foreign robe of the flesh." here Plato, Gnostic ophite sect etc.

Quote:

On the border between the intelligible and sensible realms as both a barrier and link between them (so J. Dillon),[8] is Hecate, a sort of diaphragm or membrane (frg. 6 des Places), the life producing fount (frgg. 30 &32 des Places) from which the World Soul flows (frg. 51 des Places). Finally, there is the world of Matter, springing both from the Intellect and the Father (frgg. 34-35 des Places)...the Valentinians posited an upper Limit (Horos) separating Bythos from his subordinate aeons including Nous.

J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 200* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 394-395. here

IMO, Muller's review, compared to the ones I have seen, is the best effort at going down to the sources and challenging the mythicist hypothesis as advanced by Doherty. I would suggest he structures it, condenses the arguments and have loopy footnotes or appendix if that is what it takes, otherwise, in its current state, it makes for tiresome reading.

Jacob Aliet

Earl Doherty, the Jesus Myth and Second Century Christian Writings

By: GakuseiDon

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This article looks at Earl Doherty's comments on second century Christian writings and the Jesus Myth in his book "The Jesus Puzzle". Doherty puts forward the thesis that some second apologists subscribed to a Christianity that was devoid of a historical Jesus. I conclude that Doherty's analysis is flawed, and that there is no reason to conclude that those apologists didn't believe in a historical Jesus.

Introduction

In his book "The Jesus Puzzle" [1], Earl Doherty asks "Did Christianity begin with a mythical Christ?". He examines literature from the first two centuries to support his thesis that there was no historical Jesus at the core of the Christianity that originated in the first century CE.

His book is divided into three sections. Section 1 looks at the "Son of God" movement that Doherty believes lies behind the New Testament epistles and other early Christian letters. Section 2 looks at the Gospels to identify those traditions that Doherty believes ended up in the Gospels as part of the ministry of a fictional Jesus. [2] Finally, Section 3 examines how the Gospels were constructed, and how they influenced the writings of second century apologists. [3]

This article looks at Doherty's comments on the second century apologists.

Doherty sees in the second century a continuation of the first century in terms of diversity, a lack of common doctrine, no centralized authority and a weak concept of apostolic tradition, as well as a range of silence on the reputed founder of Christianity [4]. According to Doherty, the Gospels were late first century and early second century documents, with the Gospel of Mark written about 85-90 CE, and the Gospels of Matthew & Luke around 100-120 CE. [5] Though not necessarily in the form that we know today, Doherty believes that it is likely Justin Martyr worked with 2 or 3 Gospels that had just emerged into Christian consciousness, though they existed as anonymous documents in Justin's time (150s CE). Doherty believes that the Gospels were in general circulation among the pagans by the 160s, and so pagans knew what Christians believed about their own origins by that time. [6]

While scholars specializing in the second century have characterized the Christianity of the apologists as essentially a philosophical movement, Doherty believes that some apologists gave the appearance of ignoring, and even denying, any historical figure at all. Though the 'Christian philosophy' presented by the apologists as a group had roots in Judaism, Doherty sees some of them deriving their ideas from Platonism, especially the concept of a Son of God, a 'second God' or Logos (Word), a force active in the world and serving as an intermediary between God and humanity. This idea of the Logos could be found in most Greek philosophies as well as Hellenistic Judaism in the second century. [7]

Doherty believes that these apologists subscribed to a "Logos" religion that, especially at the time of their conversions, was lacking the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. [8] But is there any evidence that any apologist in the second century believed in a Christianity that lacked a historical Jesus, as claimed by Doherty?

This article investigates those claims. It is divided into two sections:

- Section 1 examines general themes that can be found in second century writers, and how HJ and Doherty's MJ writers fit within those themes.
- Section 2 examines Doherty's comments on specific writers in the second century CE whom Doherty believes probably didn't believe in a historical Christ.

Background issues

1. *Dating.* In many cases there are difficulties in determining precisely when the writings under consideration were published. Clues as to the date of authorship can be found in the content or by citations by subsequent writers for whom we can be more confident in dating. Doherty is generally conservative in this respect, accepting the consensus of critical scholarship. I have used his dates except when otherwise specified.

2. *Questions on the authenticity of the materials.* It cannot be simply assumed that the texts that have been passed on to the present day are the same as the original autographs. During the transmission of the texts, marginal glosses, redactions, interpolations and outright forgeries are all possibilities. Here, Doherty sometimes takes more liberty than the consensus of critical scholarship. As I will point out, at times he claims the possibility of textual corruption for no other apparent reason than that he finds the text at issue damaging to his theory. Otherwise, however, I don't differ from Doherty here except when otherwise specified.

3. *Terminology.* I've used "HJ" to refer to a "historical Jesus". A "HJer" is a writer who makes explicit statements on Christ's historicity, i.e. they believe that Christ lived on this earth and interacted with his disciples as a man. A "HJer" does not necessarily mean an orthodox Christian, but covers any writer who makes statements indicating a belief in a historical Christ. This includes pagan writers like Celsus and Lucian, as well as gnostics who believed that Christ lived on earth as a man, though he wasn't composed of corruptible flesh. "MJ" is used to refer to a "mythical Jesus". An "MJer" is one of the writers identified by Doherty as believing in a Christianity that didn't include a "historical Jesus" at its core. I use "MJ" only to note that these authors are purported by Doherty to disbelieve in a historical Jesus. I will critically evaluate the basis for his belief below.

4. *Materials.* Most of the primary sources that are referenced in this paper are available in English translation on Peter Kirby's excellent "Early Christian Writings" website [9]. Richard Carrier, one of the founders of Infidels.org and a PhD candidate in ancient history, provides a good summary of early Christian writings that I use to provide background information on some of the apologists that Doherty discusses in Section 2. [10].

Section 1: Themes within Second Century Writings

1.1 HJ references in the Second Century Writers

Doherty believes that there is a “telling silence on the reputed founder” of Christianity in the second century. [4] He refers to a number of second century writers to build his case in Part 9 of his part, entitled “The Second Century”. But how great is this silence?

I’ve listed those authors that Doherty draws upon in this part of his book. There are other authors writing in the second century that he doesn’t refer to, some of whom I believe are relevant to the question of “a telling silence”. I will briefly discuss them below.

Authors referred to by Doherty in “The Second Century” section of his book are:

Author	Material	Extant?	Date	HJer according to Doherty?
'Barnabas'	"Epistle of Barnabas"	Yes	95 - 125	Yes
Clement of Rome	"To the Corinthians"	Yes	96	Ambiguous
Ignatius of Antioch	Various letters	Yes	108 i, v	Yes
Polycarp of Smyrna	"Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians"	Yes	110 - 140 ii	Yes
Papias	Fragments in Irenaeus and Eusebius	No	110 - 130	Yes
Tacitus	"Annals"	Yes	115	Yes
Marcion	Fragments	No	130 140 ii	Yes
Aristides	"Apology"	Yes	140	Yes
Justin Martyr	Various letters	Yes	150s	Yes
Lucian	"On the death of Peregrinus"	Yes	160s	Yes
Tatian	"Apology to the Greeks"	Yes	160s v	No
Irenaeus of Lyons	Various	Yes	175 - 185 ii	Yes
Theophilus of Antioch	"To Autolycus"	Yes	180	No
Athenagoras of Athens	3 letters	Yes	180s	No
Unknown	"The Epistle to Diognetus"	Yes	130 Or 200 iii	No
Minucius Felix	"Octavius"	Yes	160 - 250 iv	No
Celsus	Fragments in Origen	No	178 ii	Yes
Clement of Alexandria	Various	Yes	182 - 202 ii, v	Yes
Tertullian	Various	Yes	197 ii, v	Yes

- (i) *I have used Doherty's date, but many believe that Ignatius could be dated later, around 140 CE*
- (ii) *I can't find any clear date provided by Doherty, so I have used the date from the earlychristianwritings website*
- (iii) *There is no clear evidence for either date, but Doherty leans towards 130*
- (iv) *There is no clear evidence to narrow the date range, but Doherty leans towards an earlier date*
- (v) *These authors wrote one or more letters with historical details about Christ, as well as one or more without historical details about Christ.*

It's immediately obvious that, according to even Doherty himself, the earliest writers do in fact make references to a HJ. Though they provide few details – as discussed in Section 1.5 they are more intent on justifying Christ through the Hebrew scriptures – they undoubtedly refer to a historical Jesus, and from early on in the second century.

Of those five writers identified by Doherty as believing in a MJ, we can see that four of them arguably wrote between 160 and 180 CE, though “Octavius” could be third century. The fifth writer (“The Epistle to Diognetus”) is either 130 CE or after 180 CE.

There are also a number of other authors who make HJ statements, to whom Doherty doesn’t refer to in his book. Some of their works are extant, while others exist only in fragments in later writings:

Basilides (120-140) was a Gnostic Christian with unorthodox views of the Logos, and believed that the God of the Old Testament was not the true God:

"He appeared, then, on earth as a man, to the nations of these powers, and wrought miracles" [11]

Heracleon (150-180) was a respected teacher of the Valentinian school in Rome who wrote a commentary of the Gospel of John:

"The words “salvation is of the Jews” are said because he [Christ] was born in Judea, but not among them and because from that race salvation and the Word came forth into the world." [12]

Hegesippus (165-175) was an early Christian historian. Only fragments remain from His Five Books of "Commentaries on the Acts of the Church", including references to a HJ, and the fate of the descendents of Jesus's family. [13]

Claudius Apollinaris (160-180) was the Bishop of Hierapolis, and an early apologist:

"[O]n the fourteenth day the Lord ate the lamb with the disciples, and that on the great day of the feast of unleavened bread He Himself suffered; and they quote Matthew as speaking in accordance with their view". [14]

Melito of Sardis (165-175) was known as an early Christian philosopher:

On these accounts He came to us; on these accounts, though He was incorporeal, He formed for Himself a body after our fashion... being carried in the womb of Mary, yet arrayed in the nature of His Father; treading upon the earth, yet filling heaven... He was standing before Pilate, and at the same time was sitting with His Father; He was nailed

upon the tree, and yet was the Lord of all things. [15]

We probably only have a fraction of the materials produced in those times available for study today. The writings that survived, either in relatively complete form or as fragments, survived because they were considered useful, or worth preserving by future generations, or hidden away. The writings that Doherty identifies as expressing an MJ view were nearly all written after 160 CE, and in some cases were praised for their content by later HJer apologists (discussed further below).

It is possible that more explicit MJ writings existed but were destroyed as heretical, but I'm not aware of any evidence to that effect. Nor does Doherty provide any. Contemporaries like Irenaeus and Tertullian wrote about many of the heresies of that century, and they don't appear to have come across MJ views, or noted any controversy on such topics in their denouncements of heretics, whom ranged from those who regarded Christ as just a man (e.g. some Ebionites), or regarded Christ as someone who acted on earth but in a body not composed of flesh (e.g. various gnostic groups).

In conclusion:

We only have a fraction of the materials produced in the second century, but from those that we do have, we can see that there are many references to a historical Jesus in the early part of the century, though these writers don't appear concerned to introduce many details (as discussed further below). There is certainly no "telling range of silence on the reputed founder" of Christianity, as even the evidence by Doherty himself shows. Furthermore, Doherty appears unaware of, or has deliberately left out, other authors who make reference to a historical Jesus.

The writers that Doherty identifies as MJers nearly all wrote after 160 CE, at a time when Doherty believes that the Gospels were in general circulation among the pagans.

1.2 Apologists writing to Pagans in the Second Century

Doherty notes the "astonishing fact [that] of the five or six major apologists up to the year 180 - after that, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are all firmly anchored in Gospel tradition - none, with the exception of Justin, introduces an historical Jesus into their defenses of Christianity to the pagan" [16]. Those apologists were: Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras of Athens, the author of "The Epistle to Diognetus", Tatian and Minucius Felix.

I'm not sure what Doherty means here by 'major apologists', other than perhaps 'apologists whose works are still extant'. Certainly there were more than 6 apologists of the second century that we know about, either from extant works, or fragments preserved in the writings of later authors.

Concentrating only on the second century apologists writing to pagans, we can see that 7 of 12 refer to a historical Jesus:

Author	Wrote to:	Extant?	Date	HJ statements?
Quadratus of Athens	Emperor of the day (Fragments)	No	120 - 130	Yes
Aristides	Emperor of the day	Yes	130	Yes
Justin Martyr	Emperor of the day	Yes	150s	Yes
Claudius	Emperor of the day (Fragments)	No	160 - 180	Yes

Apollinaris				
Melito of Sardis	Emperor of the day (Large fragments)	No	160 - 177	Yes
Tatian	To "the Greeks"	Yes	160s	No
Theophilus of Antioch	Various ("To Autolycus" only extant)	Yes	180	No
Athenagoras of Athens	Emperor of the day	Yes	180s	No
"The Epistle to Diognetus"	Diognetus, "tutor to emperor Marcus Aurelius"	Yes	130 or 200	No
Minucius Felix	"To Octavius"	Yes	160 - 250	No
Clement of Alexandria	Various	Yes	182 - 202	Yes
Tertullian	Various	Yes	200	Yes

The earliest apologist on record is probably Quadratus, writing to the Emperor Hadrian around 120-130. Jerome (late fourth century) wrote that Quadratus presented to Hadrian an apologetic work "composed in behalf of our religion, indispensable, full of sound argument and faith and worthy of the apostolic teaching". [17]

The earliest extant writers are Aristides and Justin Martyr. Only the author of "The Epistle to Diognetus" may be earlier than the extant Aristides, though the evidence isn't clear on the date of this work.

In conclusion:

The earliest second century apologists writing to the pagans did indeed introduce a historical Jesus in defense of Christianity. The apologists identified by Doherty as being MJ writers nearly all wrote in the second half of the second century, at a time when the Gospels were probably already circulating among the pagans. (I examine Doherty's purported MJ writers in Section 2).

1.3 Lack of historical details in the writings of second century apologists

Doherty notes the lack of historical details in some of the apologists and concludes that "this blatant suppression of Jesus, the misrepresentation of everything from the name 'Christian' to the source of Christian ethics, amounts to nothing less than a **denial** of Christ." [18]

However, a lack of historical details is by no means restricted to those writers that Doherty identifies as MJers. There are examples of other writers in the second century and later, who make firm HJ statements in some letters, while not referring to historical details in their other writings.

Examples from the second century and the period immediately following include:

- Clement of Alexandria (182-202 CE): "Exhortation to the Heathen" (Use of 'Jesus' and 'Christ', but no historical details)
- Ignatius (108 CE): "Philadelphians", "Polycarp" (Use of 'Jesus' and 'Christ', but no historical details)
- Tertullian (200 CE): "Ad nationes" (No reference to the names 'Jesus' or 'Christ' at all)
- Tertullian (200 CE): "Against Hermogenes" (No historical details, 3

- mentions of 'Christ', none for Jesus)
- Attributed to 'Justin Martyr' (late 2nd C or 3rd C): Horatory to the Greeks (No historical details, uses 'Logos' and 'Word' throughout, with a final association to a 'Jesus Christ' in the concluding paragraph)
- Commodianus (240 CE): "Instructions of Commodianus" (No historical details) [19]

From the large fragments of Melito's "Apology" (160-177) that remain, the "Apology" possibly falls into this category as well.

Undoubtedly, the most interesting example is Tertullian's "Ad nationes" [20]. Around 197 CE, Tertullian wrote two works: "Apology" and "Ad nationes". There is definitely a literary relationship between these two works (as well as to Minucius Felix, whom Doherty regards as an MJ writer), with both works covering many of the same points.

However, while Tertullian uses the names "Jesus" and "Christ" many times and makes many references to a historical Jesus in his "Apology", **Tertullian pointedly ignores using those names**, and makes only indirect references to a HJ in "Ad nationes".

Doherty refers to Tertullian several times, and even notes that Tertullian's "Apology" is full of "vivid references" to Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection. In fact, Doherty goes so far as to say that Tertullian "indulges in no such cryptic concealment" of a historical Christ [21]. He is clearly unaware of Tertullian's "Ad nationes".

That an apologist can write two letters in the same year, one containing vivid references to historicity, and the other containing no such references (not even the names 'Jesus' and 'Christ') suggests that Doherty places too much weight on the supposed silence of certain second century apologists when it comes to using historical details of a HJ in their defense of Christianity.

In conclusion:

It is clear that early HJ writers were capable of producing letters and apologies that lacked historical details of Christ, even to the point of not referring to the names 'Jesus' and 'Christ'. While this in itself doesn't prove that the purported MJ writers believed in a HJ, the existence of those letters shows that this criteria alone cannot be used to distinguish between a HJer and an MJer. It certainly casts doubt that they "represent a denial of Christ", as stated by Doherty.

Doherty appears to have no awareness of these letters. It is clear that Doherty hasn't examined all the literature of the period, or has restricted his analysis to just those letters that support his case. In either case his analysis is based on incomplete data.

1.4 Reasons for Apologists' silence on the historical details of Christ

In his book, Doherty stresses that "nowhere in the literature of the time is there support for the standard scholarly rationalization about the apologists' silence on the figure of Jesus". He believes that "nowhere... is it even intimated that these writers have deliberately left out essential elements of Christian faith, for reasons of political correctness or anything else" [22]

However, a thorough examination of the literature does provide evidence for such reasons, which can be grouped into at least four categories:

1. *The apologists were more concerned with stopping the persecutions against the Christians of the day than converting their audience:* Many of the authors wrote to the Emperor of the day or the pagan public, as a plea for justice against the persecutions taking place, rather than as a vehicle for conversion. We can see this in the writings of HJers like Justin and Tertullian, as well as in Doherty's MJ writers like Minucius Felix. In Doherty's opinion they should have tried to rehabilitate the figure of Christ, but even the HJ writers appeared more concerned with addressing the injustices against the Christians of the day than discussing historical details of Christ (for example Tertullian's "Ad nationes").

2. *The names 'Christian' and 'Christ' were hated:* Tacitus, at the start of the 2nd C, refers to Christianity as 'a pernicious superstition', charged with the hatred of all mankind. Pliny the Younger punished those who continued to call themselves 'Christians'. Not a few of the apologists addressed letters to the Emperors of the day, decrying this injustice of persecution for 'the sake of a name'. Tertullian in "Ad nationes" notes that Christians were being punished 'in the name of the founder' [23] and wondered what harm there was in a name, all the while refusing to give the name of the founder. Other apologists make similar points, including the MJ writers (see Section 1.7 below).

3. *Christianity was viewed as a barbarous new religion:* Another charge by pagans against Christianity was that it was a new barbarous religion [24]. New sects were regarded suspiciously by the Romans, and nearly all the apologists stressed Christianity's 'antiquity' via its Jewish roots, over its more recent origin. As Karen Armstrong points out in her book "The History of God", the Roman ethos was strictly conservative, and Christians were regarded with contempt as a sect of fanatics who had committed the cardinal sin of breaking with the parent faith [25]. The apologists often referred to the ancient Hebrew prophets to try to show a continuation from ancient times.

4. *The writer adopted different approaches to different audiences.* From the writers with multiple letters still extant we can see that they varied their approach to different audiences. It is noted that Justin Martyr, for example, insists strongly on the theology of the Logos in his "Apology" to the pagans, but much less so in his "Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon" [26]. Tertullian's "Apology" and "Ad nationes" were probably written in the same year, yet the "Apology" contains many direct references to a HJ, while "Ad nationes" has none. There is a danger in trying to extrapolate a writer's beliefs based on one letter to one audience, especially to a pagan one. Had we been left with just the one 'non-HJ' letter by Ignatius, for example, how would Doherty have determined that he was not an 'MJ' writer?

Not only are these reasons intimated in the HJ writers that Doherty ignores, it is not difficult to find them in his purported MJ writers, as noted above. I provide further points of similarities below. It should be noted that these examples of **HJ writers** sharing these similarities to Doherty's MJ writers is not explored anywhere in Doherty's book.

In conclusion:

Though Doherty has rejected it out-of-hand, there are in fact good reasons to explain the apologists' reluctance to introduce historical details in their defense of the Christians of the day, especially given the persecutions that were then taking place.

It must be stressed that most of the apologists were appealing to the Emperor of the day and the pagan public in an attempt to receive justice in the face of that continuing persecution. Though they tried to put Christianity in the best possible light, their primary aim was not to convert their audience, but to appeal to them to consider Christianity as a valid religion.

A thorough review of the relevant literature is an important part in developing any thesis. It is clear that Doherty hasn't examined all the literature of the period. It is also clear that Doherty hasn't analyzed his MJ writers for points of similarities to the HJ writers of the day (more examples given below). It cannot be overstated enough that these are serious flaws in his approach to the evidence being presented in this section of his book. I suggest that it amounts to a virtual one-sided presentation of the evidence.

1.5 References to Gospel and Hebrew writings

In **Chapter 24: The Remaking of Christian History**, Doherty discusses references by early Christian writers to Gospel-like writings. Doherty writes

"In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers prior to Justin Martyr we have no clear witness to any use of written Gospels. Those who have studied this matter have concluded that the echoes of Gospel material occasionally found in the Fathers are derived from floating oral traditions or perhaps small collections of sayings; these elements would have found their own way in the written Gospels" [27]

Doherty makes much of the fact that the earliest HJ writers didn't appear to be aware of the Gospels as we know them today, and tended to describe Christ's life by using quotes from the Hebrew Bible. [28] He concludes from this that historical details were being pulled from Hebrew scriptures. This is by no means unreasonable. Whether historical details were recast using parallels found in the Old Testament, or OT passages were used to create historical details is not a new problem. Interestingly, Sanders notes that this process of 'historicizing' from scriptural writings can be observed as late as the 8th C [29], long after Christ had been established as a historical character.

While this tends to cast doubt on how much history was accurately reflected by this 'historicizing', this alone shouldn't be used to suppose that the authors didn't regard Jesus as a historical personage. Even if those authors appeared unaware of the Gospels, if they made explicit HJ statements, then how can this do anything but harm Doherty's case? As G.A. Wells (himself a 'Christ Myth' proponent) notes:

"It is of course true that the source of statements such as 'descended from David' is scripture, not historical tradition. But this does not mean, as Doherty supposes, that the life and the death were not believed to have occurred on Earth. The evangelists inferred much of what they took for Jesus life-history from scripture, but nevertheless set this life in a quite specific historical situation." [30]

To prove that the Gospel message was valid, and that Jesus was the expected Messiah, the early Christian writers had no choice but to draw upon the Hebrew Bible and 'find Christ' in there. This idea is reflected in the writings of early apologists like Ignatius and Justin Martyr. Ignatius writes on the pressure to find the Gospel message in the Hebrew scriptures:

And I exhort you to do nothing out of strife, but according to the doctrine of Christ. When I heard some saying, If I do not find it in the ancient Scriptures, I will not believe the Gospel; on my saying to them, It is written, they answered me, That remains to be proved. But to me Jesus Christ is in the place of all that is ancient: His cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith which is by Him, are undefiled monuments of antiquity; by which I desire, through your prayers, to be justified. [31]

Justin Martyr, writing around 150 CE, speaks similarly:

*For with what reason should we believe of a crucified man that He is the first-born of the unbegotten God, and Himself will pass judgment on the whole human race, **unless we had found testimonies concerning Him published before He came and was born as man** [32]*

There would have been several advantages to the apologists writing to the pagans to have stressed Christianity's roots springing from the Hebrew Bible:

1. *The Hebrew Bible and its central characters appear to have been known to the general pagan audience quite early.* Even before Josephus published his landmark histories in 90 CE, Romans appeared to have been familiar with Hebrew history and scriptures. The Roman author Strabo, writing around 20 CE, describes Moses positively as someone who 'persuaded a large body of right-minded persons to accompany him to the place where Jerusalem now stands' and 'established no ordinary kind of government', though the Jewish leaders who followed Moses became corrupted. [33]

2. *Judaism (and its writings) had a certain amount of legal standing within the Roman Empire.* An edict by the Emperor Augustus around 1 BCE declared that anyone found stealing the Jews' sacred books would have his property confiscated by the state. [34]. Judaism itself was generally (though not always) tolerated throughout the Roman Empire.

The early apologists' letters to the Emperors of their day freely made references to Moses and the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, indicating their expectation that this would carry weight with the Emperors. Even later apologists like Tertullian continued to use the prophets and passages from the Hebrew Bible, well after the Gospels had been established.

While early apologists made few references to Christian Gospels when writing to pagans, it is clear that there were writings (or at least oral traditions being passed down) that were available to Christians from early in the second century. The most famous are the references by Papias (110-130 CE), who refers to Gospels by 'Mark' and 'Matthew' [35], though it is unknown how closely they matched the ones that we know today.

Other early references to Christian 'Gospels' include:

Epistle of Barnabas (90-125 CE)

***But when He chose His own apostles who were to preach His Gospel, [He did so from among those] who were sinners above all sin, that He might show He came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."** Then He manifested Himself to be the Son of God.*

The 'Gospel' (or 'good news') referred to by 'Barnabas' was probably oral rather than written. However, 'Barnabas' goes on to say that there were teachings attributed to Christ at the time he was writing, even though 'Barnabas' was more concerned with using the Hebrew scriptures:

*[B]y preparing a new people for Himself, [he] might show, **while He dwelt on earth, that He, when He has raised mankind, will also judge them. Moreover, teaching Israel, and doing so great miracles and signs, He preached [the truth] to him, and greatly loved him".** [36]*

Ignatius (108 CE) also writes that this ‘good news’ is not to announce something new, but the fulfillment of something announced long before:

*All these have for their object the attaining to the unity of God. **But the Gospel possesses something transcendent** [above the former dispensation], viz., the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, His passion and resurrection. **For the beloved prophets announced Him, but the Gospel is the perfection of immortality.** [37]*

Apology of Aristides (140 CE), writing to the Emperor of the day:

*The Christians, then, trace the beginning of their religion from Jesus the Messiah; and he is named the Son of God Most High. And it is said that God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew virgin assumed and clothed himself with flesh; and the Son of God lived in a daughter of man. **This is taught in the gospel, as it is called**, which a short time was preached among them; and you also if you will read therein, may perceive the power which belongs to it. [38]*

Aristides’ comment to the Emperor regarding “if you will read therein [the gospel]” suggests that Aristides believed that a written source was available for the Emperor to consult. Significantly, Aristides is more interested in tying Christ back to the Hebrew bible, despite the obvious existence of a Christian gospel that is available. It suggests that Aristides regarded the quotes from the Hebrew scriptures to be more influential with his pagan audience.

It also seems clear that second century apologists were quoting from Gospel material, though they don’t make allusions to specific Gospels. Ignatius almost certainly makes prolific use of the Gospel of Matthew or a common source. [39]. Richard Carrier notes that the ‘MJer’ Athenagoras of Athens writing around 180 CE quotes or paraphrases from a few Epistles of Paul, and from all the Gospels in a mishmash, suggesting a harmonic gospel source like the Diatessaron. However, Athenagoras doesn’t feel it necessary to cite the source of his references. Similarly, Carrier notes that the ‘MJer’ Theophilus appears to be aware of Tatian’s Gospel harmonization. [10]

In conclusion:

Even though these early writers appeared to be aware of ‘Gospels’, they were more concerned in presenting their case quoting from Hebrew writings. This extended beyond the second century, long after the Gospels as we know them today were available for use.

The free references to Moses and ancient Hebrew prophets to the Emperor and pagan public suggest that the early apologists considered them to carry more influence with the pagan audience of the day.

Finally, even though there are not explicit references to Gospels by some apologists, there is still good reason to believe that those apologists were using Gospel-like materials, if not the Gospels themselves, in the construction of their apologies. The lack of explicit references can’t be taken to mean an unawareness of the Gospels or proto-gospels.

1.6 The LOGOS

Doherty believes that the apologists’ branch of Christianity that became prominent throughout the empire in the second century was a mix of Platonism and Hellenistic Judaism. In Doherty’s view, this ‘Platonic Christianity’ defined itself in ways which had nothing to do with an

historical Jesus, and probably was not an outgrowth of Pauline Christianity, as they had almost nothing in common. [40]

Was there a "Logos" based Christianity separate from a historical stream? There simply is no evidence for it. There are references to the Logos and the Word in the writings of HJ authors as early as Ignatius [41] Justin Martyr and his student Tatian were among the earliest extant apologists to make the Logos central to their writings.

The concept was adopted by orthodox Christianity as well as by streams that were later declared heretical. For example, the gnostics had created their own ideas of how the Logos related to a historical Jesus. One point of controversy was whether the Word had become corruptible flesh, or remained in 'a higher state'. Irenaeus, writing 175-185 CE, says that some believed that the Word was not made flesh, but "descended like a dove upon the dispensational Jesus" before ascending again "into the Pleroma"; others claimed that the "dispensational Jesus did become incarnate, and suffered, whom they represent as having passed through Mary just as water through a tube"; still others that "Jesus was born from Joseph and Mary, and that the Christ from above descended upon him, being without flesh, and impassible". [42] But Irenaeus doesn't refer to any heretical beliefs that Doherty infers that the MJ apologists held, i.e. a Christ that never came to earth at all.

I suggest that it isn't coincidence that the Logos became a popular theme to be used in apologies to the Emperor and pagans in the second half of the second century. The pagans already had some idea of Christian origins by the 160s, and had rejected the Christianity presented in the Gospels as superstition. The Logos would have been a useful concept to Christians trying to re-image Christianity as a philosophical school. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (Emperor from 160-180 CE) discusses the Logos in terms that Christians would have found sympathetic:

*Matter in the universe is supple and compliant, and the Reason (Logos) which controls it has no motive for ill-doing; **for it is without malice, and does nothing with intent to injure**, neither is anything harmed by it. **By its ordinances all things have their birth and their fulfillment.** (my emphasis) [43]*

In an effort to stop the persecution of Christians, the apologists began to stress its philosophical validity, and attempted to appeal to the philosophers of the day by trying to find similarities between Christianity and pagan concepts (especially Justin Martyr). Athenagoras, for example, starts his apology "A Plea for the Christians" with the following: "To the Emperors Marcus Aurelius Anoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, conquerors of Armenia and Sarmatia, **and more than all, philosophers**" (my emphasis) [44]

These writings by the "Logos" Christians were considered excellent apologies for the Christian faith by the apologists that followed. Eusebius notes that Tatian's Logos-centric Address to the Greeks "appears to be the best and most useful of all his works". [45]

In conclusion:

The concept of the 'Logos', used early in the second century by Christians, became an even more useful concept from around the time of Justin Martyr for Christians wanting to present their religion along the lines of a 'philosophical school'. This appeal to 'fellow philosophers' came at a time when Christians were being persecuted as a superstitious sect. Irenaeus's references to arguments with Gnostic sects on how the Logos related to Christianity shows that defining the Logos was a hot topic at that time; however, far from being considered heretical, the philosophic "Logos" writings of the "MJ" apologists were considered useful by the

Christians that followed.

1.7 Pagan accusations against Christians in the Second Century

Hints of the persecution against Christians can be found at the start of the second century in the writings of Tacitus and Pliny the Younger. From the writings in the 2nd half of the second century, we can get an idea of some of the specific charges being made against Christians. Most of the apologists wrote to the Emperor or the pagan public, asking for justice to be applied to individual cases instead of persecuting them for carrying the name 'Christian'. Interestingly, the MJ apologists and the HJ apologists appear to have addressed the same charges against Christianity.

I've listed common themes in the accusations against Christianity in the second century, and which HJers and MJers addressed them:

Accusation:	HJer	MJer
The injustice of persecution just for one's name	Justin, Tertullian	Tatian
Atheism	Justin	M. Felix, Athenagoras
Incestuous love feasts	Tertullian, Celsus	Athenagoras, Theophilus
Consuming human flesh, in particular that of an infant's	Tertullian	M. Felix, Theophilus
Secret rites	Celsus	M. Felix
Use of a dog in ceremonies	Tertullian	M. Felix
Worship of an asses head	Tertullian	M. Felix

I've included some quotes from HJ and MJ authors, and bolded those parts of the passages relevant to the chart above.

HJ writers:

Justin "First Apology":

*... we demand that the charges against the Christians be investigated, and that, if these be substantiated, they be punished as they deserve; [or rather, indeed, we ourselves will punish them.] But if no one can convict us of anything, true reason forbids you, for the sake of a wicked rumour, to wrong blameless men... By the mere application of a name, nothing is decided, either good or evil, apart from the actions implied in the name; and indeed, so far at least as one may judge **from the name we are accused of**, we are most excellent people... if any one acknowledge that he is a Christian, you punish him on account of this acknowledgment.*

*... **Hence are we called atheists**. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity.*

Tertullian "Ad nationes":

... and failing to make a full inquiry, which should be gone into by such as sue for a condemnation, it becomes evident that the crime laid to our charge consists not of any

*sinful conduct, but lies wholly in our name... What crime, what offence, **what fault is there in a name?***

*... Yet who ever came upon a **half-consumed corpse** (amongst us)? Who has detected the traces of a bite in our blood-steeped loaf? Who has discovered, by a sudden light invading our darkness, any marks of impurity, I will not say of **incest, (in our feasts)?...** Then he will say (to the applicant), **You must bring an infant, as a guarantee for our rites, to be sacrificed,** as well as some bread to be broken and dipped in his blood; you also want candles, and dogs tied together to upset them, and **bits of meat to rouse the dogs...** [it is said that] [w]e begin our religious service, or initiate our mysteries, **with slaying an infant.***

*In this matter we are (said to be) guilty not merely of forsaking the religion of the community, but of introducing a monstrous superstition; for some among you have dreamed that **our god is an ass's head...***

Celsus in Origen's "Against Celsus":

*The Christians entered into secret associations with each other contrary to law... **The love-feasts of the Christians,** have their origin in the common danger, and are more binding than any oaths... Christians teach and **practise their favourite doctrines in secret,** and they do this to ,some purpose, seeing they escape the penalty of death which is imminent [47].*

Doherty's "Christ Myth" writers:

Tatian "Address to the Greeks":

*Is it not unreasonable that, while the robber is not to be **punished for the name he bears,** but only when the truth about him has been clearly ascertained, yet we are to be assailed with abuse on a judgment formed without examination?*

Minucius Felix "Octavius":

*[A pagan accuser says:] I hear that **they adore the head of an ass,** that basest of creatures...*

*I know not whether these things are false; certainly suspicion is applicable to **secret and nocturnal rites...***

*Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it is well known. **An infant covered over with meal,** that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites...*

*On a solemn day they assemble at the feast, with all **their children, sisters, mothers, people of every sex and of every age.** There, after much feasting, when the fellowship has grown warm, and the fervour of **incestuous lust** has grown hot with drunkenness, **a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked, by throwing a small piece of offal** beyond the length of a line by which he is bound...*

Athenagoras "A Plea for the Christians":

*If, indeed, any one can convict us of a crime, be it small or great, we do not ask to be excused from punishment, but are prepared to undergo the sharpest and most merciless inflictions. But **if the accusation relates merely to our name**--and it is undeniable, that up to the present time the stories told about us rest on nothing better than the common indiscriminating popular talk, nor has any Christian been convicted of crime...*

*What, therefore, is conceded as the common right of all, we claim for ourselves, that we shall not be hated and punished because we are called Christians (**for what has the name to do with our being bad men?**)*

*Three things are alleged against us: **atheism, Thyestean feasts, Oedipodean intercourse**... For presenting the opinions themselves to which we adhere, as being not human but uttered and taught by God, we shall be able to persuade you not to think of us as atheists.*

Theophilus of Antioch "Book 3":

*For though yourself prudent, you endure fools gladly. Otherwise you would not have been moved by senseless men to yield yourself to empty words, and to give credit to the prevalent rumor wherewith godless lips falsely accuse us, who are worshippers of God, and are called Christians, **alleging that the wives of us all are held in common and made promiscuous use of**; and that we even **commit incest with our own sisters**, and, what is most impious and barbarous of all, that **we eat human flesh**.*

In conclusion:

Both HJ and MJ writers appeared to believe that they needed to defend themselves against similar charges. Examples included: worshipping the head of an ass; incestuous love-feasts; eating human infants; and using dogs in their ceremonies.

While not proof in themselves that they must have held similar beliefs of historicity, they suggest that pagans weren't able to distinguish between these two groups. Nor, indeed, did the Christians themselves try, despite the persecution that they were undergoing at the time. Needless to say, Doherty hasn't looked for such similarities between his HJ and MJ writers.

1.8 How the MJ writers were received

Most of Doherty's MJ writers wrote in the second half of the second century, at a time when Christianity was determining which beliefs were orthodox and which were heretical. Challenges by Marcion and Gnostic groups forced Christians to begin to formulate an 'official canon', though this process wasn't completed until centuries later.

Though most of the works denounced as heretical were destroyed, we still have some idea of their contents from the anti-heresy works of late second century writers of Irenaeus and Tertullian. These writers compiled lists of heretical works that give us some understanding of the ideas expressed by those denounced as heretics.

The heresies ranged from Ebionites, some of whom regarded Christ as just a man; to the Gnostics, who believed that Christ wasn't composed of corruptible flesh, but walked the earth in a body formed like the angels that spoke to Lot.

Much of the second century anti-heresy writers' ire was directed towards Marcion and the Gnostics. Strangely enough, even MJ authors like Theophilus wrote against Marcion, though his work is not extant. But in no case is there any mention of heresies involving a group of Christians who believed that Christ never walked the earth.

Doherty briefly notes the lack of writers who openly and in unmistakable words rejected the figure of a historical Jesus, and puts this down to "2000 years of Christian censorship" as well as to the inaccessibility to materials in the ancient world for anyone who might attempt such a thing [46].

But this hardly explains why such views were not noted by the anti-heretical works of the day. At a time when the Gnostic views on the nature of Christ's physical body were being vehemently fought against, the lack of any reference to heretics who believed that Christ didn't walk the earth at all is a significant gap.

How, then, were the MJ writers received?

From the evidence available, they appeared to have been received quite well: Carrier notes that the respect that Athenagoras's defense of Christianity earned among orthodox Christians contributed to forming decisions on canonicity based on whether they accorded with works like it [10]. Tatian's "Address to the Greeks" was described by Eusebius as "celebrated" and regarded as "the best and most useful of all his works" [45]. Even Doherty believes that Tertullian borrowed, or at least used as inspiration, passages from Minucius Felix [48].

In conclusion:

There is no evidence of any "Christ Myth" heresy to be found in the writings of anti-heresy works of the time. At a time when the Gnostics was forcing Christianity to declare which views were orthodox and which were heretical, this is a significant silence. While the works of such writers may have been destroyed, it is difficult to understand why the anti-heresy writers wouldn't have included references to them, as they did to many other heretical writings that didn't survive.

It should also be noted that at least one of Doherty's MJ writers also composed anti-heresy works against Marcion. I suggest it would have been very difficult for a writer to compose such a work without revealing something of their own beliefs about the nature of Christ.

Finally, from the evidence that we do have, it appears the MJ writers were praised for their contributions, to the point that the anti-heresy writer Tertullian was inspired by one of the MJ writers when constructing his own apology.

Section 2: Doherty's MJ Apologists

This section looks at the apologists that Doherty believes were defending an MJ in their apologies: Tatian, Theophilus, Athenagoras of Athens, Epistle to Diognetus, and Minucius Felix.

In my opinion, the evidence for Tatian being a HJer at the time he wrote his "Address to the Greeks" is overwhelming. As Tatian has general elements in common with the other MJ writers, I have spent more time below on him, and only cover specific points that Doherty raises on the other MJ writers. But first I'll start with some curious comments Doherty makes about Justin Martyr.

2.1 Justin Martyr

Doherty notes the conversion of Justin Martyr in this way: [49]

The Dialogue with the Jew Trypho was written after the Apology, and the latter can be dated to the early 150s. But the action of Trypho is set at the time of the Second Jewish Revolt, in the 130s, and scholars are confident that this represents the time of Justin's conversion, which he describes in the opening chapters.

By the sea near Ephesus Justin encounters an old man, a Christian philosopher. After a discussion of the joys and benefits of philosophy, the old man tells of ancient Jewish prophets who spoke by the Divine Spirit. These prophets, he says, had proclaimed the glory of God the Father and his Son, the Christ. (This was the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Platonic terms.) Wisdom could come only to those who have it imparted to them by God and his Christ.

At this, says Justin (8:1), "a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets and of those who are friends of Christ possessed me." Justin does not even say (despite the best attempts of some commentators) that he felt a love for Christ himself, for in the Christianity to which he was converted, Christ was a philosophical concept. He was a part of the Godhead in heaven, a Logos-type entity. This Christ is a Savior by virtue of the wisdom he imparts (8:2). This is Justin's concept of salvation here, for he goes on to conclude the story of his conversion by saying to Trypho: "If you are eagerly looking for salvation, and if you believe in God, you may become acquainted with the Christ of God and, after being initiated, live a happy life." (Later, under the influence of the Gospels, Justin laid increasing emphasis on the redeeming value of Christ's death and resurrection, but in the basic Logos religion the Son saves by revealing God.)

Where is Jesus of Nazareth in all this? The old philosopher had not a word to say about him, nor about any incarnation of the Son. We are fortunate that Justin did not recast the memory of his conversion experience in the light of his later beliefs based on the Gospels. In those opening chapters of the Dialogue with the Jew Trypho we can see that all the apologists came to the same Christian faith: a Platonic religious philosophy grounded in Hellenistic Judaism which fails to include any historical Jesus.

For Doherty, Justin appears to have converted to a Christianity missing the figure of a Jesus of Nazareth. However, I find it simply incredible that Doherty is trying to draw such a meaning from the silence in **one part** of a letter, where the rest of the letter contains many details of a historical Jesus.

Justin spends some time leading up to the passage quoted by Doherty to show that he, as a philosopher, was convinced by philosophical arguments. Justin is stressing that he "found this [Christian] philosophy alone to be safe and profitable". This is a theme that we've already seen in the apologetics of that period, and appears to be an attempt to present the persecuted Christianity as a philosophical school.

Some points:

- The old man does make a statement which, combined with the substance of Justin's later comments, appears to be a strong reference to the incarnation. The old man claims that the ancient prophets "glorified the Creator, the God and Father of all things, and proclaimed His Son, the Christ [sent] by Him". Later, Justin states 'Of these and such like words written by the prophets... some have reference to the first advent of Christ, in which He is preached as inglorious, obscure, and of mortal appearance'. In other words, Justin makes clear in the text that **the ancient prophets proclaimed a HJ**. Doherty gives no reason why this not what Justin's "old man" is also referring to.
- Justin states that the old man spoke "these and **many other things, which there is no time for mentioning at present**". Justin then continues his argument with Trypho by giving many details of Christ's earthly mission. What were the "many other things" that the old man spoke of? Is there any reason why Justin can't be referring to the details that he gives later?

Doherty continues:

Trypho himself may be a literary invention, but Justin puts into his mouth (8:6) a telling accusation, one which must have represented a common opinion of the time: "But Christ—if he has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown . . . And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves . . ."

I can only assume that Doherty is implying that a common opinion of the time was that it was unknown whether Christ had been born and existed anywhere.

In fact, looking at the context of that passage, it is clear that Trypho is not questioning a historical Jesus, but simply questioning whether Jesus could possibly have been the Christ. As Trypho says, a sign that Christ had come would have been "Elias come to anoint Him". Since that hadn't happened, Christ couldn't have come yet, and therefore the historical Jesus couldn't have been Christ. Doherty has badly misread the source here. Peter Kirby analyses this further in his on-line article 'Note on Trypho'. [50]

In conclusion:

Doherty's conclusion that Justin converted first to a philosophical Christianity devoid of a historical Jesus is nonsensical. To attribute such a view to Justin when the letter is full of references to a historical Christ in the absence of clear-cut evidence to the contrary defies logic. There is no reason to draw the conclusions that Doherty makes regarding the early conversion of Justin Martyr.

Furthermore, Doherty has badly misread the source by implying that Trypho's statement is an inference that supports the existence of a non-historical Christ.

2.2 Tatian

Tatian was a student of Justin Martyr, who later apostatized and joined a Gnostic sect. He wrote many works, including one of the earliest harmonies of the four Gospels. As Carrier notes:

“Curiously, the first "orthodox" Christian move toward canonization begins outside the Roman Empire, in the Syrian church. Moreover, this canon was ultimately not in Greek, but was a Syrian translation (M 114-7). The single man responsible is Tatian, who was converted to Christianity by Justin Martyr on a visit to Rome around 150 A.D. and, after much instruction, returned to Syria in 172 to reform the church there, banning the use of wine, the eating of meat, and marriage (M 115). At some point in all this (it is suggested c. 160 A.D.) he selected four Gospels (the four we now know as the canon, and which no doubt supported his own ideology and that of his tutor, Justin) and composed a single harmonized "Gospel" by weaving them together, mainly following the chronology of John. This is called the Diatessaron ("That Which is Through the Four")... The only complete work of Tatian's that survives is his "Oration to the Greeks" which is a scathing attack on Greek culture. We know he wrote books prolifically on a number of other topics. He was probably the first Christian to do so, apart from Justin". [10]

Doherty provides this background:

"We turn now to Tatian, a pupil of Justin. He was converted to Christianity, he says, by reading the Jewish scriptures. At a later stage of his career, after apostatizing to the heretical sect of the Encratites and going off to Syria, Tatian composed the Diatessaron, the first known harmony of the four canonical Gospels. But while still in Rome, sometime around 160, he wrote an Apology to the Greeks, urging pagan readers to turn to the truth. In this description of Christian truth, Tatian uses neither "Jesus" nor "Christ" nor even the name "Christian."

Much space is devoted to outlining the Logos, the creative power of the universe, first-begotten of the Father, through whom the world was made—but none to the incarnation of this Logos. His musings on God and the Logos, rather than being allusions to the Gospel of John, as some claim, contradict the Johannine Prologue in some respects and may reflect Logos commonplaces of the time". [51]

Doherty doesn't explain what the contradictions are here, so I can't comment. As Doherty notes, Tatian does indeed make a comment that could very well be a reference to the incarnation: "We do not act as fools, O Greeks, nor utter idle tales, when we announce that God was born in the form of a man" [52] And how does Tatian view God and the Logos? The Logos is described in terms very similar to the beginning of the Gospel of John. And not unexpectedly, Tatian uses the same concepts as his teacher, Justin, in describing the nature of the Logos. I've highlighted some parallels from a couple of passages in both:

Tatian

*Him (the Logos) we know to be the beginning of the world. **But He came into being by participation, not by abscission**; for what is cut off is separated from the original substance, but that which comes by participation, making its choice of function, does not render him deficient from whom it is taken. **For just as from one torch many fires are lighted, but the light of the first torch is not lessened by the kindling of many torches,** so the Logos, coming forth from the Logos-power of the Father, has not divested of the Logos-power Him who begat Him. I myself, for instance, talk, and you hear; yet,*

certainly, *I who converse do not become destitute of speech (logos) by the transmission of speech*, but by the utterance of my voice I endeavour to reduce to order the unarranged matter in your minds.

Justin Martyr

that God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos... For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father's will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will; just as we see happening among ourselves: for when we give out some word, we beget the word; yet not by abscission, so as to lessen the word [which remains] in us, when we give it out: and just as we see also happening in the case of a fire, which is not lessened when it has kindled [another], but remains the same; and that which has been kindled by it likewise appears to exist by itself, not diminishing that from which it was kindled. [53]

While it is possible that Tatian adopted Justin's terminology and still rejected Justin's view of a historical Jesus, there is no evidence that this occurred. At the very least, the similarities show that Tatian's view of the Logos was not inconsistent with that of the HJer Justin, his teacher. Tatian refers to Justin several times in his Address to the Greeks, and even calls him "the admirable Justin".

There are other parallels between Tatian's Address and Justin's writings that show Justin's influence on Tatian. Tatian also notes his agreement on Justin's views of demons being "robbers".

Doherty continues: "*Resurrection of the dead is not supported by Jesus' resurrection*".

Tatian's teacher, Justin Martyr, also addresses the question by pagans on the resurrection of the dead, and also doesn't appeal to the resurrection of Christ in his answer [32]. In both cases, the writers are responding to the pagan argument about the resurrection in the flesh at the end of time. Pagans were questioning whether this is possible if the flesh has in fact already been destroyed:

- Tatian response is orthodox: "*Even though fire destroy all traces of my flesh, the world receives the vaporized matter; and though dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord*".
- Justin Martyr responds similarly: "*In the same way, then, you are now incredulous because you have never seen a dead man rise again [Note: Keep in mind that **this is a HJer** speaking]. But as at first you would not have believed it possible that such persons could be produced from the small drop, and yet now you see them thus produced, so also judge ye that it is not impossible that the bodies of men, after they have been dissolved, and like seeds resolved into earth, should in God's appointed time rise again and put on incorruption*"

Justin Martyr's response shows that the pagans (not unexpectedly) had probably already rejected the notion of a resurrected dead man. Jesus's resurrection is irrelevant to Justin's and Tatian's argument since it was a philosophical argument concerning whether physical resurrection was possible after the flesh had been dispersed.

Doherty continues: “*Eternal life is gained through knowledge of God (13:1), not by any atoning sacrifice of Jesus*”

The HJer Irenaeus also discusses “eternal life” without referring specifically to any atoning sacrifice of Jesus, and in terms very similar to Tatian. Eternal life is gained by ‘seeing God’ and believing in the Son:

*Men therefore shall see God, that they may live, **being made immortal by that sight**, and attaining even unto God; which, as I have already said, was declared figuratively by the prophets, that God should be seen by men who bear His Spirit [in them], and do always wait patiently for His coming.*

*Since the Son of God is always one and the same, **He gives to those who believe on Him a well of water [springing up] to eternal life** [54]*

Doherty continues: “*In Tatian's Apology we find a few allusions to Gospel sayings, but no specific reference to written Gospels and no attribution of such things to Jesus*”.

I have to wonder what significance Doherty draws from this, since Doherty himself later shows that Tatian all but refers to something like the Gospels. I discuss this below. But we should note that Tatian’s teacher Justin Martyr also doesn’t specifically name any Gospels, referring to them as “Memoirs of the Apostles”. Yet Doherty elsewhere in his book has stated that Justin was probably acquainted with several Gospels. [55]

Interestingly, Doherty seems to grant that it is possible that Tatian refers indirectly to both the incarnation and gospel material. He writes:

“In chapter 21 he [Tatian] says, “We are not fools, men of Greece, when we declare that God has been born in the form of man (his only allusion to the incarnation) . . . Compare your own stories with our narratives.” He goes on to describe some of the Greek myths about gods come to earth, undergoing suffering and even death for the benefaction of mankind. “Take a look at your own records and accept us merely on the grounds that we too tell stories. This may well be a reference to the Christian Gospels. But if he can allude to the incarnation in this way, why does he not deal with it openly and at length?” [56]

But surely the primary question here isn't "why does he not deal with it openly", but **what is he referring to by "our narratives"**? If this is not a reference to the gospels, then what can they be? Are they narratives relating to the Logos? But then, what of Tatian’s comment that "God has been born in the form of a man", and his comparisons with gods coming to earth and suffering? Are we to assume that the student of Justin Martyr believed that the Logos came to the earth in the form of a man and suffered, and this is NOT a reference to Christ? Or if these relate to "Logos narratives", why then doesn't Tatian deal with them openly?

If, as Doherty says, everyone knew what Christians believed about their origins by the time that Tatian wrote his Apology (160s), then the Greeks would have understood what "our narratives" to be. Like Aristides, Tatian seems to be assuming that they are available to his audience.

How did Tatian view “those narratives”?

Doherty writes that the way Tatian compares them to the Greek myths implies that he regards them as being on the same level, nor does Tatian rush to point out that the Christian stories are

superior or, unlike the Greek ones, factually true.

But, in fact, Tatian does just that:

*Wherefore, looking at your own memorials, vouchsafe us your approval, though it were only as dealing in legends similar to your own. **We, however, do not deal in folly, but your legends are only idle tales.** [52]*

Is this not Tatian doing exactly what Doherty says he didn't do? Describing the Greek legends as 'only idle tales' suggests that Tatian's 'narratives' were not. Nor was Tatian the only writer to make this point. Justin Martyr also wrote similarly, stating that the Greek myths were fables created by demons as pale imitations of prophecies regarding Christ in Hebrew scriptures. Tertullian also talked of Greek "fables" resembling Christian gospel stories, except that the Christian claims were true:

*This ray of God, then, as it was always foretold in ancient times, descending into a certain virgin, and made flesh in her womb, is in His birth God and man united. The flesh formed by the Spirit is nourished, grows up to manhood, speaks, teaches, works, and is the Christ. **Receive meanwhile this fable, if you choose to call it so--it is like some of your own--while we go on to show how Christ's claims are proved, and who the parties are with you by whom such fables have been set a going to overthrow the truth, which they resemble.** [57]*

To summarise:

- (1) Tatian says "We are not fools, men of Greece, when we declare that God has been born in the form of man", which appears to be a reference to the incarnation.
- (2) Tatian notes the similarities of Greek myths about gods coming down to earth and undergoing suffering with "our narratives". However, the Greek myths are 'only idle tales', while 'we do not deal in folly'. This is similar to ideas expressed by Justin Martyr and Tertullian.
- (3) Tatian makes apparent allusions to Gospel sayings, though, like Justin Martyr, he doesn't name the Gospels.
- (4) Tatian was a student of Justin Martyr, and parallels in their writings are evident. Justin himself associates the "Logos" ("Word") with "Christ" many times in his Apologies. Even if Tatian were an MJer, he had to have been aware of the gospels and the names "Jesus" and "Christ", as well as their association to the Logos at the time he wrote his Address.
- (5) Tatian describes Justin as "the admirable Justin" and notes that both he and Justin were threatened with death by Crescens for speaking out about corrupt philosophers.
- (6) Irenaeus, a contemporary of Tatian, noted that Tatian didn't express any heretical views until after Justin's martyrdom. He describes Tatian's heretical views on marriage and the significance of his denial of Adam's salvation [58], but nothing at all about any belief in a non-historical Christ. Afterwards Tatian became an Encratite gnostic, and apparently believed that Christ was a historical figure, though only taking on the appearance of flesh. [59]
- (7) Tatian's "Address to the Greeks" not only survived but was described by Eusebius as "celebrated" and regarded as "the best and most useful of all his works" [45].

(8) Tatian later wrote one of the first known harmonies of the Gospels called the Diatessaron, which Doherty puts down to a "change of mind" regarding the use of the Gospels, though he offers no proof of this.

In conclusion:

There is overwhelming evidence that Tatian's "Address to the Greek" is the product of a HJ. Tatian almost certainly refers to the incarnation and gospel material, and discusses the Logos in the same terms as Justin Martyr. Like Tertullian, Tatian avoids using the terms 'Jesus' and 'Christ'; however, he was a student of Justin, who had already associated Christ with 'Logos', 'Son of God' and 'Word of God' in his writings. He had to have been aware of Justin's idea of Christ, and his association of the Christ with the Logos, at the time he wrote the "Address".

Irenaeus, a contemporary of Tatian's, was aware of Tatian's doctrine and discussed some of his later heresies, but didn't note any belief in a non-historical Christ in his anti-heresy works, even though he listed many variations of Gnostic heresies.

Tatian describes Christian "narratives" as being similar to pagan "fables", except that the Christian narratives were not "idle tales". Similar views can be found in the writings of his teacher Justin Martyr and the later apologist Tertullian.

Afterwards Tatian wrote one of the first known harmonies of the Gospels. His "Address to the Greeks" was described by a later writer as "the best and most useful of all his works".

2.3 Theophilus

Theophilus was apparently the bishop at Antioch, and so a successor to Ignatius, who was also a bishop at Antioch. Carrier notes:

"Near Tatian's Syrian church, but across the border in Roman territory (and amidst a decidedly Greek culture) flourished bishop Theophilus at Antioch, around 180 A.D. (M 117-9). Theophilus is important for a variety of reasons: he was the second, very shortly after Athenagoras (below), to explicitly mention the Trinity (Ad Autolycum 2.15); he may have composed his own harmony and commentary on the four Gospels chosen by Tatian; and he wrote books against Marcion and other heretics. He is also a window into the thinking of converts: he was converted by the predictions concerning Jesus in the OT (ibid. 1.14), perhaps the weakest grounds for conversion. But most of all, he routinely treats Tatian's Gospels as holy scripture, divinely inspired, on par with the Hebrew prophets (M 118). He also refers to John's Revelation as authoritative". [10]

Doherty writes:

"Consider Theophilus of Antioch. According to Eusebius, he became bishop of the Christian community in that city in 168, but one has to wonder. In his treatise To Autolycus, apparently written toward the year 180, he tells us that he was born a pagan and became a Christian after reading the Jewish scriptures, a situation common to virtually all the apologists.

But what, for Theophilus, is the meaning of the name "Christian"? The Autolycus of the title has asked him this question. He answers (I.12): "Because we are anointed with the

oil of God." Though the name "Christ" itself means Anointed One, from the anointed kings of Israel, no mention is made to Christ himself in regard to the meaning of "Christian".

The HJer Tertullian also makes much the same comment in his "Ad nationes": *"The name Christian, however, so far as its meaning goes, bears the sense of anointing"* Like Theophilus, Tertullian in "Ad nationes" doesn't mention the names 'Jesus' or 'Christ' at all, much less use the name to describe the meaning of "Christian". It is obvious Doherty hasn't examined all the relevant literature. [60]

Doherty continues:

"Along with the pronouncements of the Old Testament prophets, he includes "the gospels" (III.12), but these too are the inspired word of God, not a record of Jesus' words and deeds. When he quotes ethical maxims corresponding to Jesus' Gospel teachings, he presents them (II.14) as the teaching of these gospels, not of Jesus himself".

Theophilus actually attributes them to "the holy word". Comments by Celsus, a pagan philosopher of Theophilus's time (around 180 CE) show that they were acquainted with the teachings in the Gospels. As Doherty has noted, pagans after 160 CE knew what Christians understood about their origins, so would have understood Theophilus's reference to the Gospels. Again, I suggest that the primary question isn't "why doesn't Theophilus refer directly to Christ", but "what do we understand from what he is saying"? Theophilus writes:

*(Ch 13) And concerning chastity, the **holy word** teaches us not only not to sin in act, but not even in thought, not even in the heart to think of any evil, nor look on another man's wife with our eyes to lust after her... And the **voice of the Gospel** teaches still more urgently concerning chastity, saying: "Whosoever looketh on a woman who is not his own wife, to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." "And he that marrieth," says [the Gospel], "her that is divorced from her husband, committeth adultery; and whosoever putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery.*

*(Ch 14) **And the Gospel says:** "Love your enemies, and pray for them that despitefully use you. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? This do also the robbers and the publicans." And those that do good it teaches not to boast, lest they become men-pleasers. For it says: "Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth."*

Is there any reason why Theophilus couldn't actually be quoting from a Gospel? The avoidance of the names "Christ" and "Jesus" is consistent with Tertullian and (almost certainly) Tatian. Reasons for this were given in Section 1.

Doherty writes that "Theophilus has not a thing to say about this Word's incarnation into flesh, or any deed performed by him on earth". But this is not quite true. Theophilus does claim that the Logos acted on earth:

*And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-bearing [inspired] men, **one of whom, John, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,"** showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing*

came into existence." The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place.

In that passage, Theophilus is referring to the Word speaking with OT characters, an idea found in other HJ Christian writings of the time. It certainly appears to be an indication of the Word being **physically active on earth**, and, assuming that he is quoting from the opening lines from the Gospel of John, is almost certainly an expression of the incarnation.

Doherty writes:

"Here he [Theophilus] seems to quote part of the opening lines of the Gospel of John, the Word as God and instrumental in creation, but nothing else. Is this from the full-blown Gospel, or perhaps from the Logos hymn John drew upon? (The name "John", the only evangelist mentioned, could be a later marginal gloss inserted into the text; but see below.) Such writers, Theophilus says, are inspired men, not witnesses to an historical Jesus." [61]

As far as I know, the reference to the Gospel of John is not regarded as a marginal gloss. Doherty gives no support for such a belief that I can find (despite his "see below" comment). As Carrier has noted, Theophilus is almost certainly aware of Tatian's harmony of the Gospels, as well as the Revelation of John. It is by no means unreasonable that Theophilus was also aware of the Gospel of John.

A reference to a named Gospel of John would appear to be conclusive evidence establishing Theophilus as an orthodox Christian. It makes sense that an apologist wanting to give Christianity the credibility of being a "Platonic" based philosophy, would use the most "logos" based statement available in the Gospels.

Other points:

(1) Eusebius mentions other writings by Theophilus which are no longer extant: a work against the heresy of Hermogenes, another against Marcion, and a few books for the instruction and edification of the faithful.[62]. How would an author who believed that there was no historical Jesus have written a work against Marcion without betraying such a view? I suggest that it is highly improbable.

(2) As discussed in the first section, Theophilus is concerned with refuting the same calumnies (accusations) that plagued all Christians of that century.

In conclusion:

1. Theophilus refers directly to the Gospel of John, quoting the most "Logos" based statement available in the Gospels. Doherty suggests that this is a marginal gloss, but there is no evidence for this that I can find.
2. Theophilus refers to John's Revelation as authoritative
3. Theophilus refers to the Logos as appearing and speaking on earth
4. Theophilus wrote other works no longer extant, against the heretics Marcion and Hermogenes, and a few books for the instruction of the faithful, as noted by Eusebius. I suggest it would have been difficult to write an anti-heresy work against Marcion without describing his own views on the incarnation of Christ.
5. Theophilus feels that he needs to refute the same accusations that HJ Christians refuted.

2.4 Athenagoras of Athens

Not much is known about Athenagoras of Athens, except the information found in the works he left behind. Carrier notes:

In 177 A.D. Athenagoras of Athens composed a lengthy philosophical Defense of the Christians addressed to the emperor Marcus Aurelius in which the first articulation of a theory of the Trinity appears. He quotes the OT and NT several times, but does not name his sources from the NT. The quotes or paraphrases that he uses happen to come from a few Epistles of Paul, and from all the Gospels in a mishmash (M 125), suggesting a harmonic source like the Diatessaron. But the respect that this defense, and others like it, earned among orthodox Christians contributed to forming decisions on canonicity based on whether they accorded with works like it. [10]

Doherty raises many of the same issues that have been addressed earlier:

- Athenagoras's apology is Logos-centric
- No specific references to the Gospels
- No reference to 'Christ' or 'Jesus'

Athenagoras's "Plea for the Christians" to the Emperor is probably the most philosophical of the apologies in that period to the pagans. He makes it clear that he is a philosopher writing to other philosophers. He starts his apology with the following (Ch 11):

*"A Plea for the Christians by Athenagoras the Athenian: Philosopher and Christian. To the Emperors Marcus Aurelius Anoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, conquerors of Armenia and Sarmatia, **and more than all, philosophers...** What, then, are those teachings in which we are brought up? "I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Allow me here to lift up my voice boldly in loud and audible outcry, pleading as I do before **philosophic princes.**" [44]*

As noted earlier, Athenagoras has set out to provide a philosophical rather than historical defense of Christianity. While no specific reference is given to the Hebrew Bible or the Gospels, he clearly has knowledge of them, as well as to a few Epistles of Paul, despite his reluctance to use the names 'Christ' and 'Jesus'. Athenagoras defends Christianity from some of the same calumnies as the other apologists, as noted in Section 1.

In conclusion:

Athenagoras fits within the pattern of the apologetics of the day. As Carrier notes, Athenagoras does appear to quote from the Gospels as well as a few epistles of Paul, though without attribution. Like Tertullian's "Ad nationes", he doesn't refer to 'Jesus' or 'Christ'. The apology itself earned the respect among orthodox Christians in the years after it was written.

2.5 Epistle to Diognetus

The author of the "Epistle to Diognetus" is unknown, but it appears to have been written to the Emperor of the day, either 130 CE or 180 CE. Doherty leans towards the earlier date, though there is little conclusive evidence either way. Doherty writes: [63]

We find an allusion (9) to the Atonement: "He (God) took our sins upon himself and gave

his own Son as a ransom for us," but his description of this act is based on scripture. No Gospel details are mentioned, no manner of the Son's death (if that's what it was), no resurrection. All this is in response to Diognetus' "close and careful inquiries" about the Christian religion. The final two chapters of the sole surviving manuscript, which contain a reference to apostles and disciples of the Word, have been identified as belonging to a separate document, probably a homily from the mid to late second century.

In fact, there are hints in the Epistle relating to an incarnation. In Ch 7, the author writes:

*For, as I said, this was no mere earthly invention which was delivered to them, nor is it a mere human system of opinion, which they judge it right to preserve so carefully, nor has a dispensation of mere human mysteries been committed to them, but truly God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, **and placed among men**, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. He did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who bear sway over earthly things, or one of those to whom the government of things in the heavens has been entrusted, but the very Creator and Fashioner of all things--by whom He made the heavens... This [messenger] He sent to them. Was it then, as one might conceive, for the purpose of exercising tyranny, or of inspiring fear and terror? By no means, but under the influence of clemency and meekness. As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; **as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him**, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God. As calling us He sent Him, not as vengefully pursuing us; as loving us He sent Him, not as judging us. **For He will yet send Him to judge us, and who shall endure His appearing?** [64]*

It's possible the author means that God sent the Messenger to people's hearts only, but the context doesn't support this. The author echoes the HJer Irenaeus who makes a similar point: that men "who through faith [in the advent of Christ] do establish the Spirit of God in their hearts" are "spiritual" and "living to God". [65] The author says that God will "yet send Him to judge us", which sounds consistent to orthodox Christianity.

In conclusion:

The author of the Epistle to Diognetus, despite no explicit reference to a historical Jesus, expresses himself in orthodox terms. He appears to make a strong inference to the incarnation.

2.6 Minucius Felix

Doherty regards 'Minucius Felix' as his 'smoking gun'. The author, Minucius Felix, wrote his treatise 'Octavius' (the work is generally known by the name of its author) sometime between 160 CE and 250 CE, though Doherty leans towards the earlier date.

Minucius Felix appears to have been modeled on Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinationes*, as well as on Seneca's *De Providentia* and *De Superstitiones*. Like Athenagoras, the author wished to offer to educated pagans a defence of Christianity that would be acceptable to them, and written in a literary form that they would appreciate. Thus, the author stresses the ethical and spiritual teachings in a form familiar to his pagan audience. [66]

Doherty raises many of the same issues that have been addressed earlier, e.g. the lack of reference to the names 'Jesus' and 'Christ'. He then writes:

But here is where it becomes interesting. For no other apologist but Justin has voiced and dealt with one particular accusation which the writer puts into the mouth of Caecilius. The list of calumnies in chapter 9 runs like this (partly paraphrased):

*"This abominable congregation should be rooted out . . . a religion of lust and fornication. They reverence the head of an ass . . . even the genitals of their priests **And some say that the objects of their worship include a man who suffered death as a criminal, as well as the wretched wood of his cross; these are fitting altars for such depraved people, and they worship what they deserve** Also, during initiations they slay and dismember an infant and drink its blood . . . at their ritual feasts they indulge in shameless copulation."*

Remember that a Christian is composing this passage. (The sentence in italics is translated in full.) He has included the central element and figure of the Christian faith, the person and crucifixion of Jesus, within a litany of ridiculous and unspeakable calumnies leveled against his religion—with no indication, by his language or tone that this reference to a crucified man is to be regarded as in any way different from those other items: disreputable accusations which need to be refuted. Could a Christian author who believed in a crucified Jesus and his divinity really have been capable of this manner of presentation? [67]

Doherty presents the author Minucius Felix (hereafter called M.Felix) as appearing to deny that the Christian faith includes a crucified man and his cross. But is this in fact the case? The Latin for the sentence highlighted by Doherty is:

"Et qui hominem summo supplicio pro facinore punitum et crucis ligna feralia eorum caerimonias fabulatur, congruentia perditis sceleratisque tribuit altaria, ut id colant quod merentur".

The key word here is "facinore". In Latin, "**facina –oris**" has the meaning of "**bad deed, crime, villainy**". So the sense being expressed is that the man was punished "for bad deeds" or "for villiany".

While not necessarily wrong, the translation that Doherty uses (I understand that Doherty himself translated this passage) is most 'fortunate', as it de-emphasizes the very aspect that any Christian would have found disturbing: that Christians worshipped a common criminal who had committed actual crimes.

A look at some other translations is informative: Roberts-Donaldson:

*"[H]e who explains their ceremonies by reference to a man punished by extreme suffering **for his wickedness**, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve". [68]*

Rendall and Kerr (Cambridge, Mass. 1931):

*"To say that **a malefactor** put to death **for his crimes**, the wood of the death-dealing cross, are objects of their veneration is to assign fitting altars to be abandoned wretches and the kind of worship they deserve".[69]*

The Roberts-Donaldson translation is a better fit for the context of the passage, which lists the charges against the Christians in Minucius Felix's time. The pagan accusation here is: Not only are Christians wicked because their founder was wicked, they even venerate the actual crosses used to crucify people.

M.Felix's reply to this charge is:

*For in that you attribute to our religion **the worship of a criminal and his cross**, you wander far from the neighbourhood of the truth, in thinking either that a criminal deserved, or that an earthly being was able, to be believed God.*

Note that M. Felix is NOT denying that his religion worships a crucified man, as Doherty implies [70]. How do pagans 'wander far from the truth'? It isn't by thinking that Christians worshipped a criminal and his cross, **but by thinking that anyone would worship someone who was an actual criminal**. Rather than being a denial that Christians worshipped a crucified man, it appears to be an affirmation that the person being worshipped was crucified. I believe that Doherty has badly misrepresented the source here. Given that M.Felix is dated after 160 CE (up to 250 CE), his pagan audience would have almost certainly concluded that this comment was a reference to Christ.

M.Felix continues by stating that, while some men could be chosen to be worshipped as a god, only a good man can inspire love:

*The Egyptians certainly choose out a man for themselves whom they may worship; him alone they propitiate; him they consult about all things; to him they slaughter victims; and he who to others is a god, to himself is certainly a man whether he will or no, for he does not deceive his own consciousness, if he deceives that of others. Moreover, a false flattery disgracefully caresses princes and kings, not as great and chosen men, as is just, but as gods; **whereas honour is more truly rendered to an illustrious man, and love is more pleasantly given to a very good man.***

So, "you wonder far from the truth in believing that a criminal could be worshipped" is followed up by "love is given to a very good man". This appears to be the very defense of "the crucified criminal" that Doherty says is lacking.

As before, Doherty asks how can a Christian be so obscure, but again, the primary question in a thesis regarding the question of Christ's historicity should be: what is M.Felix saying about his beliefs? Given the late date that this was written, his comments as read can only apply to Christ. Again, Doherty doesn't ask: if M.Felix has another version of Christianity, then why doesn't he clearly give that version?

It's been noted that there is a relationship between 'Octavius' and Tertullian's "Apology" and "Ad nationes". In "Ad nationes", Tertullian addresses some of the same accusations against Christianity that M.Felix does (e.g. worshipping an asses head, love-feasts), and also doesn't use the names 'Christ' or 'Jesus' to do so. I've suggested some reasons why in the first section, but it is enough to know that M.Felix follows the same style of presentation used by other HJ writers.

Doherty continues:

As to the accusation of worshiping crosses, he says dismissively: "We do not adore them, nor do we wish for them." And he goes on to admonish the pagan for being guilty of using signs of crosses in their own worship and everyday life. There is not a hint that for

Minucius the cross bears any sacred significance or requires defending in a Christian context. [71]

Doherty has **badly** misread the source here. Far from admonishing the pagan "for being guilty of using signs of crosses", M.Felix is **defending the sign of the cross as a symbol of worship**, noting that pagans also worship the sign of the cross:

*Crosses, moreover, we neither worship nor wish for. You, indeed, who consecrate gods of wood, adore wooden crosses perhaps as parts of your gods. For your very standards, as well as your banners; and flags of your camp, what else are they but crosses glided and adorned? Your victorious trophies not only imitate the appearance of a simple cross, but also that of a man affixed to it. We assuredly see the sign of a cross, naturally, in the ship when it is carried along with swelling sails, when it glides forward with expanded oars; and when the military yoke is lifted up, it is the sign of a cross; and **when a man adores God with a pure mind, with hands outstretched. Thus the sign of the cross either is sustained by a natural reason, or your own religion is formed with respect to it.***

So, the sign of the cross is formed when 'a man adores God with a pure mind, with hands outstretched'. This is a defence of the sign of the cross by any measure. Note that Tertullian makes a similar defense of the shape of the cross in his "Ad nationes" by claiming that pagans also worshipped the sign of the cross:

The frames on which you hang up your trophies must be crosses: these are, as it were, the very core of your pageants. Thus, in your victories, the religion of your camp makes even crosses objects of worship; your standards it adores, your standards are the sanction of its oaths; your standards it prefers before Jupiter himself, But all that parade of images, and that display of pure gold, are (as so many) necklaces of the crosses. in like manner also, in the banners and ensigns, which your soldiers guard with no less sacred care, you have the streamers (and) vestments of your crosses. [72]

What about M.Felix's comment "We do not adore them [crosses], nor do we wish for them"? Doherty says that M.Felix is dismissing the idea of the worship of the cross. But again, Doherty has badly misread the source. In the passage above, M.Felix has defended **the sign of the cross**. However, the initial charge that M.Felix addresses is that Christians venerate the **actual crosses that people were crucified on**, and perhaps even use them as altars. So M.Felix is refuting the charge that Christians do not adore nor wish for actual crosses. Note that M.Felix immediately goes on to state that "when a man adores God with a pure mind with hands outstretched", he naturally forms the sign of a cross – a strange comment if he was dismissing the significance of the sign of the cross.

In conclusion:

M. Felix follows the same style as other apologists of the period. There is nothing there that suggests that the author believed in a non-historical Christ.

Furthermore, Doherty has badly misrepresented the content of M. Felix:

1. He uses a 'fortunate' translation that de-emphasizes the very aspect that any Christian would have found disturbing: that Christians worshipped a common criminal who had committed actual crimes.
2. He states that M.Felix dismisses the worship of the sign of the cross, when in fact M.Felix supports it.
3. M.Felix doesn't deny that Christians worshipped someone who was crucified as Doherty

implies, but that an actual criminal wouldn't be worshipped, since honor is rendered to an illustrious man.

Conclusion

Looking at second century Christian writings as a whole, we can see many references to a historical Jesus from the early part of that century. The writers that Doherty identifies as MJers nearly all wrote after 160 CE, at a time when Doherty believes that the Gospels were in general circulation among the pagans

In an era where non-orthodox views were denounced as heretical, it is difficult to believe that a sect which believed that there was no historical Jesus could exist without notice. Anti-heresy writer Irenaeus listed many different types of gnostics and their ideas on how the Logos related to Jesus, but seems to have missed the existence of a sect that didn't believe in any incarnation on earth. And according to Doherty, not only did that MJ sect exist, but they wrote similar apologies as the HJ Christians to the Emperors of the day, to the extent that they defended themselves against the same charges!

Not only were MJ views not noticed by near contemporary writers like Irenaeus and Tertullian, they were praised and even copied. Furthermore, in some cases Doherty's MJ writers also wrote anti-heresy tracts themselves. Would it have been possible to write an anti-Marcion tract without somehow betraying a non-historicist position? Possibly, but I suggest that it is unlikely.

As for the five apologists that Doherty claims believed in a non-historical Christ: there simply is no evidence that they held a belief inconsistent with the HJ writers of that time. Most of the points that Doherty raise fail due to him misrepresenting his source (e.g. M. Felix); missing internal statements that tell against his view (e.g. allusion to incarnation in "Epistle to Diognetus" and uses of Gospel material by Athenagoras); ignoring external evidence regarding the author (e.g. Theophilus wrote anti-Marcion tracts); or presenting rhetorical questions to make his points instead of analyzing the source (for example Tatian's meaning of "our narrations")..

But by far the biggest flaw is that Doherty clearly hasn't examined all the literature of the period. There are examples of HJ writers producing materials that have all the hallmarks of Doherty's MJ writers. There are hints in the literature for why the apologists of that period wrote their apologies in that style: an eagerness to show Christianity as philosophically similar to pagan ideas; a plea for justice for Christians against persecution; an expectation that referring to ancient Hebrew writings would carry weight with the Emperors of the day.

It is also clear that Doherty hasn't tried to analyze the literature to look for points of similarities between the MJ writers and the HJ writers of the day.

These represent serious problems in his approach to this section of his book, and amounts to a virtual one-sided presentation of the evidence.

That's not to say that Doherty could not still be correct. It is possible that any author who didn't refer to a historical Christ actually believed in a non-historical Christ, though I wonder why the lack of explicit references to a mythical Christ are not considered problematic. If Doherty could find evidence of the following, his case regarding his MJ second century apologists would have some validity:

1. Statements that explicitly state that Christ was non-historical.
2. Evidence of the existence of a sect holding a non-historical view of Christianity, perhaps in the anti-heresy writers of that time.
3. Statements within his MJ writers that contradict the orthodox Christian views of the day with regards to the nature of Christ or the Logos that imply non-historicity.

From the evidence currently available, most of the writers in the second century referred to a historical Christ, and there is no reason to suggest that those who didn't refer to a historical Christ believed in a mythical Christ along the lines that Doherty suggests in his book.

Footnotes

1. Doherty, Earl. The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity begin with a mythical Christ, Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999. (Paperback edition)
2. Reviews looking at topics raised in the first two sections of Doherty's book:
Carrier, Richard: http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.shtml. Carrier is sympathetic to Doherty's thesis on the 1st C authors in the first two parts of Doherty's book, though he doesn't look at 2nd C authors.
Bede. : <http://www.bede.org.uk/jesusindex.htm>. Bede has listed a number of reviews that generally take an anti-mythicist stance.
3. Reviews looking at topics raised in the third part of Doherty's book:
Holding, JP. <http://www.tektonics.org/doherty/dohertypatr.html>. Apologetics website, looking at Doherty's comments on 2nd C authors.
Pearse, Roger. <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/incarnation.html>. Brief review of 2nd C authors' ideas on the incarnation.
4. Doherty, p. 276
5. Doherty, p. 196
6. Doherty, p.200
7. Doherty, p. 276
8. Doherty, p.283
9. Early Christian Writings: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>.
10. Richard Carrier, The Formation of the New Testament Canon (2000), http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/NTcanon.html
11. Basilides, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/basilides.html>
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Response to Gakusei Don

by Earl Doherty

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Preface

A contributor to the Internet Infidels Biblical Criticism and History forum who goes by the name of "GakuseiDon" recently posted a critique of the "Jesus in the Christian Apologists" chapter of my book, *The Jesus Puzzle*. I am familiar with him only through the IIDB, and am unaware of any other work by him; his critique does not seem to be part of a larger web site. While it is of sufficient quality and substance to merit a reply, I will style him an "apologist" (rather than a neutral critical historian) for reasons which will become clear in this response. The critique can be read at:

<http://www.christianorigins.com/2ndcdon.html>

In the discussion on the IIDB thread which followed GDon's notification about his critique, a few points were raised which I would like to address as a prelude to examining the text of the critique itself. One is in regard to the silence in Paul and other early epistle writers about historical details in the supposed recent life of Jesus. This involves a misunderstanding of the situation which I have tried on many occasions to correct, seemingly to no avail, and one wonders how serious certain people can claim to be in addressing the substance of the mythicist case before undertaking a condemnation of it. When the "silence" in the epistles is referred to by such critics, it is always in terms of what Paul and the other early writers do *not* mention, rather than what they *do*. I have styled this difference the negative vs. the positive silence. By focusing only on the former, apologists think to be able to appeal to the limits (or outright invalidity, as they like to put it) of the argument from silence. There could always be *some* explanation, they claim, for why Paul does not mention such-and-such, even if this involves just about everything to do with an historical life, and even in situations that would cry out for such mentions. Be that as it may, what is conveniently ignored are the positive things that Paul states about his faith, his object of worship, the beginnings of the movement, and so on; some of his and others' statements clearly *exclude* the idea of an historical founder while many others make it highly unlikely. These are clearly laid out in my book and on this website, and have been raised in internet arguments over the years, but they have yet to be properly addressed. (I'll mention a few shortly.) These "positive silences" are not so easy to ignore or dismiss, even though scholarship as a whole tends to do precisely that.

"Bede" on IIDB had this to say:

But is it [GD's case against my Second Century Apologists chapter] fatal to Doherty's thesis? Probably not. The dividing line that he can always point to (assuming he does retreat from his second century examples [which, of course, I have no intention of doing]) is the Jewish revolt ending in 70AD. Aside from Paul, getting back before that is always hard (although Hebrews is a big help here), and the only way to kill mythicism is to prove that Paul knew of a historical Jesus. Given almost all scholars (all until Carrier's so far unexplained conversion) already think this is proven, the argument is unlikely to develop.

What we need is someone very good at Greek (which means neither you, me, Doherty or Carrier) to carefully analyse the relevant Pauline passages with all the critical apparatus

that is available. Then we will see where we are. I suppose the advent of computerised texts does make this much easier, though.

Well, many have tried to prove that Paul knew of an historical Jesus, but this has so far been a failure except through reading meanings into Paul that are not evidently there and by ignoring the "positive" things I referred to. The fact that so many scholars "already think this is proven" is a good measure of the lack of seriousness and honesty they have brought to the question, and how much of their stance is simply predetermined. While I won't get overly offended by Bede's snide accusation about the quality of my Greek, its lack of proficiency remains to be demonstrated—by "good" scholars or otherwise. Simply assuming that one of those "good" scholars *could* demonstrate it (which is his implication) won't do. It's similar to the common claim that a "good" scholar or historian could shred the mythicist case if only they would undertake to do so. This remains an assumption—and thus invalid as an argument—until someone actually does it and shows that it's possible. However, I *am* offended on Richard Carrier's behalf, whose proficiency in Greek is undoubtedly superior to mine and does not merit such offhanded disparagement. And since Carrier has in fact offered an explanation for his recent conversion to the probability of the mythicist position, one can only assume that Bede has been forced to ignore or dismiss this as well.

Let's also look at some remarks on IIDB by GakuseiDon:

The problem is that from what I see, there is currently no case to rebut. There are a series of statements from Doherty regarding the writings of Christians in the first couple of centuries, but when you try to pin down the case that he is actually arguing, things get frustratingly vague. There is no cohesive case there. All that we are left with are a number of curiosities - Paul's lack of references of Jesus's ministry, for example - that tend to get argued separately.

That's one reason why I wanted to concentrate specifically on Doherty's comments on second century writings. At least there were specific claims that could be examined and possibly rebutted. I don't think there is ANY way to rebut "Paul was a mythicist who presented a historicized version to non-initiates" [if this is supposed to be a shorthand reference to my position, it is erroneous], short of Paul saying, for example, "Jesus was REALLY born of a woman".

I can't speak to GDon's ability to perceive cohesive cases, but there are many who see the case laid out by ***The Jesus Puzzle***, and on the website, as comprehensive, coherent and anything but fragmented. This would be a good time to briefly mention a few examples of those "curiosities" regarding Paul and others. Again, GDon styles it in terms of "a lack of references to Jesus' ministry," but the situation is far more sweeping and positive than that. He and others consistently ignore passages such as these:

Romans 16:25-26: "...the gospel about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept in silence for long ages but now revealed. and made known through prophetic writings at the command of God..."

2 Corinthians 5:5: "God has shaped us for life immortal, and as a guarantee of this he has sent the Spirit."

Titus 1:3: "Yes, it is eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, and now in his good time he has openly declared himself in the proclamation which was entrusted to me by God our Savior."

1 Corinthians 12:28: "Within our community, God has appointed...apostles...prophets and teachers."

1 Peter 1:7: "...so that your faith may prove itself worthy when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Romans 8:22: "Up to now, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth...we wait for God to make us his sons and set our whole body free."

I don't intend to reargue the details of the case here, but I offer the above as examples of the sorts of statements that saturate the epistles, giving us a comprehensive picture of a faith which began with God's revelation of his Son through scripture, one that is impelled by the Spirit rather than the memory of a human Jesus, wherein the "gospel" being preached is that of "God" and nothing is presented as having been instituted by a recent human founder, where no historical Jesus is inserted between God's promises and prophecies, and their fulfilment in the missionary movement. Jesus himself is a "secret/mystery" revealed by God to apostles like Paul, after long ages of being unknown, an entity who will be coming to earth only in the future. And so on. The case is not nearly so simple as Paul failing to mention features of Jesus' earthly ministry. If the Gospel preconceptions are set aside, we have no "curiosities" here. Rather, we find in the epistles a consistent, sensible and clearly stated picture of a faith movement like others of its day, one that was an expression of contemporary religious and philosophical trends, and one that did not involve a recent historical figure. Without the Gospels and 19 centuries of church tradition created out of them, nothing would seem out of place or lacking. There is nothing "vague" or uncohesive about it.

I review this background not only because there are too many who still turn a blind eye to it, but because with such a scenario in mind for the beginnings of the movement—or part of it—it becomes much easier to situate and evaluate elements such as the second century apologists within the larger picture. I'll also add another misconception which has skewed GDon's and others' criticisms. Historicists are still tied to the old paradigm of a Christianity which was, if not entirely unified, essentially a singularity, linear in its development. One thing supposedly grew into the next, and more or less in lockstep. They have failed to appreciate the chaotic, fragmentary nature of the entire movement, different streams from different places flowing at different times into the ultimate Christian river.

The documentary evidence ranges from the purely philosophical "only-begotten Son" and Logos of Philo, to the scripture-revealed sacrificial Christ of Paul, to the Revealer-Son of some of his rival apostles who regarded a crucified Messiah as "folly," a Revealer found at the base of the Gospel of John as well. Hebrews has an entirely unique take on a High Priestly Christ whose sacrifice takes place in Heaven, based on the Temple cult. Documents like The Odes of Solomon and the Shepherd of Hermas reveal other sects' mystical beliefs in a heavenly Son who is a channel of knowledge like Wisdom and non-sacrificial. The Gnostic Savior concept can be regarded as part of a separate stream (critical scholarship now largely considers gnosticism as having had an independent genesis, though a certain amount of merging with the Christian Jesus was to take place), as can the Logos religion of the major apologists. Out of left field came the wisdom and apocalyptic preaching of a Kingdom of God movement which impelled the addition of a Galilean ministry to create the Gospel Jesus, and so on. Some of the objections of mythicism's detractors are best dealt with when this picture of diversified origins is taken into account.

A Picture of the Second Century

To some extent, GDon has misrepresented my position in this chapter of my book. In "Jesus in the Christian Apologists" (which, alone among the chapters of *The Jesus Puzzle*, is a reproduction of the "Second Century Apologists" article on my website, with only minor changes), I define an "apologist" as one who is presenting a document or documents that are defenses of the faith, and I make the claim that a "majority" of those that are reasonably extant do not speak of an historical Jesus. Thus an inclusion in his critique of figures like Ignatius and Polycarp is not valid. Nor of Basilides and Heracleon who are not apologists. I also make it clear that my parameters in this study of the second century do not extend beyond the year 180 or so. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian lie outside this group, falling into a later time frame in which I pointed out that virtually all Christian writers were now on board the train of belief in the historicity of the Gospel Jesus. I realize that it may be valid to examine the content of those later writers to help evaluate the 'silence' of the earlier ones, which GDon tries to do, but only if that content is properly represented, which as I will demonstrate is not the case here.

No one is denying that, surveying all of the second century writers from start to finish, a great many seem to have believed in some kind of historical Jesus, although with some of them, particularly in the gnostic category, it may be hard to tell just what was the nature envisioned for such a figure. But my emphasis was on a certain group of apologists from whom we have major and complete works which purport to give a comprehensive presentation of the faith, chiefly for outsiders. By examining that group, it was my intention not only to show how they differed from the circles that produced and subscribed to the Gospel story and character, but to cast light on the variety of expressions within the Logos- and Christ-belief phenomenon. If there could be shown to be a broad segment of expression covering several major apologetic documents over several decades, all ignoring or even denying by implication the existence of an historical founder, it speaks to a "Christianity" which encompassed a version of faith which did not include an historical Jesus. It serves to undermine the validity of belief in those circles which by that time did envision such a figure, since it would belie the unity and singular origin of the movement as a whole.

It has long been acknowledged by scholars of the second century apologists that they show little if any connection to the type of cultic Christianity of the first century as represented by Paul. They thus find themselves in the position of having to explain this discontinuity. What happened to divorce the second century stream represented by the apologists from the first century Pauline antecedent? In that group, including Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix and (I maintain) in Justin's earliest thinking, there is not only no historical founder in view, there is no idea of incarnation, there is no atonement doctrine and no Calvary, there is no resurrection of a human or divine entity from the dead. These are major voids, quantum divergences from a presumed original faith movement that are hardly explainable by the rather feeble rationalizations provided by modern scholars. But they are hamstrung by their own preconceptions. They are reading a certain set of documents and beliefs into everything else. The most plausible explanation is that there was no discontinuity, no divorce or divergence from Paul or some of the early Fathers of the Church. Rather, these are the varied expressions of general trends of belief found throughout the Empire, trends which were only gradually coalescing and evolving into a commonality based on the ever more appealing and powerful figure created by the Gospels.

Even in Paul's day, there were "apostles of the Christ" going about preaching the message of "another Jesus" (based, like his own, on the "spirit"—meaning revelation—and not historical tradition) which was so at odds with his own he could call them agents of Satan (2 Corinthians 11). There is thus nothing unusual at encountering a range of apologetic works produced in the

second century which could diverge so widely from each other, some based on knowledge of the Gospel story with biographical details of an historical founder, while others are devoid of such things, presenting nothing so much as a Logos religion. (Many scholars of the second century use this term to describe the apologists.) The mistake is to try to force them all into the same mold, all products of a unified movement with a single origin. One of the other aspects of that group of second century apologists which I failed to emphasize is their total lack of a sense of history. They talk of their religion essentially as a philosophy, not as an ongoing movement with a specific century of development behind it, through a beginning in time, place and circumstance, and a spread in similar specifics. It's not just Paul and his type of faith they show no knowledge of.

This is not to say that they were necessarily oblivious to other current expressions. Both Tatian and Minucius Felix indicate that they were. But since these elements were not part of their own faith, they could ignore them—or criticize them. Just as we have a perplexing range of documents from the first century of Christian faith which scholars have great difficulty in pulling into line with orthodoxy and a single chain of development, we encounter the same variety and difficulty in the second century, only with some recognizable signs of gravitational pull. But as long as scholars, whether of the first or second century, refuse to countenance the conclusion which all this diversity points to, namely that what became Christianity did not go back to a single founder or point of origin, we will continue to flounder in this sea of uncertainty and debate.

But on to specifics.

Throwing Light on the Apologists

Following on his Introduction and opening survey of the Christian writers of the second century, GDon focuses in on the apologists themselves. In his list, he includes three whose works exist only in fragments, Quadratus of Athens, Claudius Apollinaris, and Melito of Sardis. As I said earlier, while it is clear that these writers did indeed refer to their belief in an historical Jesus, it is difficult to evaluate their overall attitudes toward the faith and the type of "defense" they offered in the absence of complete works, and in the uncertainties attached to what little has survived. In my book I briefly mentioned a similar document that was discovered in its entirety in the late 1800s, the little apology of Aristides. I pointed out that it was a work in Syriac from the Levant area, based on a knowledge of some Gospel or Gospel traditions. Since it has nothing to say about the Logos or Greek philosophical concepts, it is clearly in a different category from the major apologists. Its literary quality and breadth of thought is very limited. As to the others, Quadratus exists in only one brief fragment, which makes an allusion to the healings of "the Savior" and how many who were so healed survived to the writer's own time, a claim hardly less than outrageous. As it would have been impossible for someone in the second quarter of the century to reasonably make such a claim, the integrity of this lost work is greatly devalued. Apollinaris is equally obscure, with what little preserved scarcely telling us that it comes from an apology. For Melito, the situation is chaotic in the extreme. Remarks about him by later writers such as Eusebius are unreliable, contradictory, and most likely second or third hand. Titles of works are uncertain or corrupted; inauthentic attributions abound.

Nor are the datings of these works and fragments all that secure. GDon is not the first to tout Aristides and Quadratus as "early" apologists, but the emperors to whom they are reputed to have addressed their works have been questioned. (See *The Apology of Aristides*, p.10-17; I do not have at hand an author's name for this book, though it was published early in the 20th century. It argues for a dating of Aristides later than 140, and Quadratus in the latter second century, rather than earlier.) Indeed, all the traditional datings of the apologists, with the exception of Justin and

Tatian, are dependent on later assumptions about their authors and who they wrote to, and we are not unfamiliar with interpretations and traditions coming from later Christian commentators which do not stand up to critical scrutiny. Thus, GDon's arguments relating to relative dating and which type of apologist are to be assigned to which part of the second century are in some cases resting on shaky ground.

In any event, my lack of inclusion of such uncertain and fragmentary works in a study of "the major apologists" is hardly surprising, and GDon tries to make too much of it. His own inclusion of these obscurities I regard as an example of apologetic padding, designed to enable him to say that of "the second century apologists writing to pagans, we can see that 7 of 12 refer to a historical Jesus." And, as I've pointed out above, that "7" includes the later Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, who belong as much to the third century as to the second.

Here and later, GDon makes the claim that I regard the Gospels as "probably already circulating among the pagans" shortly after the year 150. I've never gone so far as to say they were "circulating," though I acknowledge that certain interested and knowledgeable pagan writers such as Celsus may well have read one or more such documents, in whatever state they may have existed at that time. My point, rather, was that some pagans, including among those being addressed by the apologists, were undoubtedly *familiar* with Gospel traditions about a human Jesus as the founder of the movement and certain teachings and events associated with him. We should note that such familiarity is only in evidence from the latter second century, and not before—with the sole exception of the reference in Tacitus, whose authenticity remains under a cloud. (I happen not to commit myself to inauthenticity, and can dismiss its 'witness' value on other grounds.) Pliny's letter gives us no witness to a figure who was historical, nor does Suetonius, and no satirist before Lucian around 160 gives any attention to the outlandish beliefs of the Christians regarding a crucified man and his resurrection.

But by far GDon's most misguided appeal is to later writers who clearly believe in an historical Jesus but in certain of their documents do not mention historical details about him. GDon thinks to link this to my statement in regard to the earlier apologists, that "this blatant suppression of Jesus, the misrepresentation of everything from the name 'Christian' to the source of Christian ethics, amounts to nothing less than a *denial* of Christ." But there is a huge difference between a writer who nowhere in his work betrays a knowledge of an historical Jesus and those who do, but happen not to mention him in specific places. Such later authors as Clement and Tertullian do *not* deny the human Jesus in their works as a whole, and to interpret a silence in one particular document as such a thing borders on the dishonest; it is certainly a misapplication of the concept. Nowhere does Clement or Tertullian say something like, "I have gone into every aspect of our religion" while failing to mention Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnation, the resurrection and so on. Nowhere do they give us disparaging remarks about a crucified man such as we find in *Minucius Felix*, or an outright ridicule of the concepts of gods being born or coming back from the dead such as we find in more than one writer. Silence in a particular spot or document, when balanced by open presentation in others, is not "concealment." It is unclear to me how GDon cannot recognize the fallacy of his comments in regard to Tertullian, when he acknowledges that there are indeed "vivid references" to Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection in the *Apology* but none, not even the names Jesus and Christ, in the *Ad Nationes* (both written in the same year, he notes), as though this somehow provides a case against my stance on the earlier apologists. He might as well have declared that the absence of such things in one chapter of a work in contrast to their mention in another chapter of the same work is significant as well. The point is, we do not have additional works from the earlier apologists verifying that they did indeed believe in an historical Jesus, and this makes all the difference in the world.

GDon lays particular emphasis on the *Ad Nationes* of Tertullian (written c.217) and accuses me

of being "clearly unaware" of the work. I am sorry to disappoint him. In no small fashion does he misrepresent the content and significance of certain passages of this document. He refers to Tertullian's remarks in Chapter 3 about the meaning of the term 'Christian': "The name *Christian*, however, so far as its meaning goes, bears the sense of anointing." And he thinks to make a comparison with Theophilus' similar remarks in *To Autolycus* [I, 12]: in response to some disparagement by Autolycus (not quoted), Theophilus says, "Wherefore we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God." Here Theophilus is *defining* the meaning of the term, and it does not include any reference to "Christ"; nor is there anywhere else in this writer a counter-balancing reference to such a figure or to an alternate or additional meaning for the name. The situation in Tertullian could not be in greater contrast. First of all, his reference to the 'anointing' sense of *Christian* is in the context of a lament that the pagans are persecuting believers on the basis of their name, not their alleged activities, and he wishes to point out the good qualities inherent in the name itself. To that end he talks of it "bear[ing] the sense of anointing." He is not *defining* it here, and he goes on to add to that positive image by pointing out that when the pagans mispronounce the name "Chrestians" they are creating their own "sense of pleasantness and goodness." There is no question of misrepresentation or concealment here as there would have to be in Theophilus, who presents a definition of the name "Christian" solely in terms of anointing.

But that's not the end of it. Surely GDon himself read further, into Chapter 4, which opens: "But the sect, you say, is punished in the name of its founder." Not only is this an admission that the term Christian is based on the founder figure, it tells us that the pagans so regarded it as well. Tertullian goes on:

"Now in the first place it is, no doubt a fair and usual custom that a sect should be marked out by the name of its founder, since philosophers are called Pythagoreans and Platonists after their masters; in the same way physicians are called after Erasistratus, and grammarians after Aristarchus. If, therefore, a sect has a bad character because its founder was bad, it is punished as the traditional bearer of a bad name. But this would be indulging in a rash assumption. The first step was to find out what the founder was, that his sect might be understood, instead of hindering inquiry into the founder's character from the sect. But in your case, by being necessarily ignorant of the sect, through your ignorance of its founder, or else by not taking a fair survey of the founder, because you make no inquiry into his sect, you fasten merely on the name, just as if you vilified in it both sect and founder, whom you know nothing of whatever." [*Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 3, p.111-112]

It is a mystery how GDon can hold up a document containing a passage like this as casting any light on apologists like Theophilus. It matters little if the name of this founder is not actually stated (something which GDon makes a big issue of), or if no details of his earthly career are mentioned in a treatise which is wholly devoted to countering the calumnies levelled by the pagan against the Christian, and (in Book II) to a critical condemnation of the pagan gods. *Ad Nationes* is in no way a defense of the Christian faith, unlike the *Apology* which is; the latter contains no shortage of reference to Christ as a human man in history. GDon is appealing to a technicality, building a mountain out of a molehill. (While admitting that *Ad Nationes* does indeed relate 'Christian' to "the name of the founder," he adds, "all the while refusing to give the name of the founder." This is a blatant apologetic twist, forcing some significance on the absence of the name which is hardly justified by the text itself.) Given the narrow nature of the *Ad Nationes* subject matter, there is nothing particularly unusual, significant, or "weird" (as one reviewer on Amazon put it) about the lack of mention of Jesus' name or historical activities.

GDon misrepresents the case by reducing it to the simplistic claim that I regard the absence of the terms "Jesus" and "Christ" as the criterion for distinguishing an "MJer" (Mythical Jesus)

from an "HJer" (Historical Jesus). It is not simply the presence or absence of a term, but the picture created by the writings of a given author as a whole and their commonality of content with other similar writers around the same time. If I did not include Tertullian in my examination of the second century scene, it is because he fell later than my parameters (both the *Apology* and the *Ad Nationes* post-date, at the earliest, the year 198), and because I never considered anyone would have the temerity to hold up the situation in that apologist's work as some kind of argument against my reading of documents several decades earlier. Again, it amounts to padding on GDon's part, and misleading padding at that.

Tertullian does something in the above quoted passage that none of those earlier apologists do, which makes it even more disingenuous for GDon to lump them all together. Tertullian goes so far as to demand that the pagan "find out what the founder was, that his sect might be understood." He criticizes the pagan for being ignorant of the founder, not "taking a fair survey of him." GDon can hardly impute to Tertullian a conscious concealment of Jesus in *Ad Nationes* (he is doing so if he insists on creating a parallel between Tertullian and the earlier apologists whom he claims are doing just that), since this would contravene Tertullian's insistence that the pagan should familiarize himself with the founder, the better to understand and evaluate the sect. Making such an appeal is the direct opposite of what GDon and others suggest is the tacit strategy of most of the earlier apologists, who are alleged to have set about to deliberately hide the founder from the pagan—a true "conspiracy of silence."

Explaining the Silence

At this point, GDon goes on to offer reasons for the apologists' silence on the historical Jesus and the details of his life. Again, he misrepresents my position. He quotes me (accurately) as saying that "nowhere in the literature of the time is there support for the standard scholarly rationalization about the apologists' silence on the figure of Jesus...nowhere is it even intimated that these writers have deliberately left out essential elements of Christian faith, for reasons of political correctness or anything else." But in claiming that in fact such things *are* to be found in the texts, he distorts the meaning of my statement.

That is, he fails to make an important distinction. The reasons he offers for the apologists' silence are *conclusions* that are drawn by modern scholars, based on factors they have identified in the second century. But these are not reasons which are intimated by the apologists themselves. In other words, no one says or even implies, "I am being silent on the historical Jesus, I am deliberately downplaying or obscuring his role, even to the point of seeming to mislead the reader, because of such-and-such a factor in the present day." That implication is being read into the situation by modern scholars, and it is a judgment which ought to be overridden by other considerations which I point out, considerations which should make the carrying out of such deliberate silence, even in the face of those alleged factors, highly questionable. Let's look at GDon's enumeration of them.

1. *"The apologists were more concerned with stopping the persecutions against the Christians of the day than converting their audience: ... In Doherty's opinion they should have tried to rehabilitate the figure of Christ, even the HJ writers appeared more concerned with addressing the injustices against the Christians of the day than discussing historical details of Christ (for example Tertullian's 'Ad Nationes')."*

Regardless of whether this was the case, it should not have precluded the apologists from presenting essential elements of the faith picture, especially when they are purporting to do that very thing. If, as GDon himself would assume, the pagans were already familiar with basic Jesus and Gospel traditions, what is to be gained for the supposed purpose of the apology by being

silent on them? In fact, would it not be counter-productive in the eyes of the pagans to appear to be concealing, denying and misleading the reader? When a defendant conceals information about his activities in regard to the circumstances surrounding a crime, this creates suspicion, not mollification. The proper course would certainly have been to attempt to rehabilitate Jesus if he was a real elephant in the room. And GDon himself is being counter-productive in appealing once again to *Ad Nationes*, for Tertullian does precisely the opposite: he does not remain silent on the historical Jesus. In fact, he urges his readers to learn about him. If he felt it was OK not to hide all mention of the founder in a closet, why did the earlier apologists not feel the same way?

2. "*The names 'Christian' and 'Christ' were hated: Tacitus...refers to Christianity as 'a pernicious superstition', charged with the hatred of all mankind'...*"

Indeed they were, but it was hardly on account of the figure of Jesus or his reputed teachings, or even for claims that he had been resurrected from the dead. Such things had sufficient commonality with the cultic beliefs of pagans themselves (as Celsus admits and attests) that they would hardly have provoked the reaction witnessed to by the apologists. Rather it was the calumnies of alleged pernicious activities on the part of Christians, together with their denial of the traditional gods and refusal to engage in state religious observances, that led to denigration and charges of hatred. We can hardly imagine that the teachings of Christ (or most of them) as laid out in the Gospels would have been regarded by pagans as abominable, or that his reputed miracles—especially the healings—would not have placed him in a popular vein that included their own healer god Aesclepius. Thus there would have been every reason for apologists to accentuate these things, not bury them, as promising avenues to convincing the pagan that Christianity was founded on commendable and attractive elements.

3. *Christianity was viewed as a barbarous new religion: ... New sects were regarded suspiciously by the Romans, and nearly all the apologists stressed Christianity's 'antiquity' via its Jewish roots, over its more recent origin....* As Karen Armstrong points out in her book *The History of God*, the Roman ethos was strictly conservative, and Christians were regarded with contempt as a sect of fanatics who had committed the cardinal sin of breaking with the parent faith. The apologists often referred to the ancient Hebrew prophets to try to show a continuation from ancient times."

This claimed Roman attitude is clearly an exaggeration. The Greeks and Romans alike regularly embraced new cults, new saviors, coming from more outlandish reaches than Palestine and the Jews. I can't verify his reading of Karen Armstrong, as he must have a different edition of her book than my own, but I'm very dubious about the Romans regarding the Christians with contempt for breaking away from Judaism, a faith they hardly held in high esteem themselves; or for simply doing such a thing in principle. In any case, concealing Jesus would hardly improve the matter. In fact, GDon's observations about referring to Christianity's 'antiquity' and continuation from the Hebrew prophets ought to have led the apologists to present Jesus as the *fulfilment* of Jewish and prophetic expectations (even if the Jews themselves refused to see it that way). If the pagans already knew about Jesus anyway, why pass up the opportunity to put a better spin on him as a link to ancient precedents, as the culmination of Judaism? As I said by way of introduction, the drawbacks to silence make less sense than the alleged reasons put forward by apologists for that silence.

4. "*The writer adopted different approaches to different audiences.*"

What writers? Almost all the ones we are examining, Theophilus, Athenagoras, Minucius Felix, Tatian and the author of Diognetus do *not* show different approaches to different audiences. We only have examples of one approach. GDon is simply appealing here to Tertullian, the invalidity of which I have addressed above, and to this he adds the scarcely relevant observation that Justin

discusses the Logos "much less so" in *Trypho* than he does in his *Apology*. Also, GDon cannot leave the subject without appealing to that much-used fallacy of implying that there may have been lost documents by those one-trick apologists which *could* have adopted a different approach on other occasions and mentioned an historical Jesus. This kind of argumentation is utterly without merit, as I have often complained, and is a mark of desperation. We cannot make judgments based on things we don't have and know nothing about.

GDon wraps up this section by reiterating his lack of distinction I mentioned above. I do not "ignore" his alleged reasons for the silence found in the apologists' writings because they are not there. The writers themselves do not intimate them (let alone state them) as motivations for or factors in their silence. While these factors were indeed present in the situation of the time, it is simply modern apologists' own reasoning that they were the cause impelling the writers to silence. My point is that there is no indication from the writers themselves that they were, and that other factors such as I have discussed would have proven much stronger in impelling them to bring Jesus into the light rather than keeping him in a darkness which would have been ineffective anyway.

I would thus regard this aspect of GDon's critique as entirely ineffectual. And my observations should cast a different light on his summary declaration at the end of this section:

A thorough review of the relevant literature is an important part in developing any thesis. It is clear that Doherty hasn't examined all the literature of the period. It is also clear that Doherty hasn't analyzed his MJ writers for points of similarities to the HJ writers of the day (more examples given below). It cannot be overstated enough that these are serious flaws in his approach to the evidence being presented in this section of his book. I suggest that it amounts to a virtual one-sided presentation of the evidence.

I'm afraid I *do* regard this as an overstatement, simply because GDon has brought in writers who are *not* directly relevant to the chapter he is addressing, and presents them in a manner which is misleading when comparing them to the body of apologists I deal with. As for his alleged "points of similarity" with acknowledged "HJ writers of the day," these will be further dealt with when he brings such writers forward for examination.

Plumbing the Hebrew Scriptures

GDon addresses the copious appeal to scripture by early Christian writers, especially of the Gospels, in their presentation of a 'biographical' picture of Jesus. While admitting that doubt is cast on the historical accuracy of accounts that are seemingly constructed entirely out of scripture, he maintains that "this alone shouldn't be used to suppose that the authors didn't regard Jesus as an historical personage." I've never claimed that it should, although it's a strong part of a collective argument. It is hard to understand why scripture would be the sole source in the presentation of a 'biography' given the reasonable assumption that oral traditions about Jesus' life should have been plentiful, and there should have been no reason to ignore them. Nor should there have been the limitless leeway many subsequent evangelists allowed themselves in reworking virtually everything in the supposedly historically-based accounts created by their predecessors. GDon's appeal to G. A. Wells' remarks also doesn't work. Wells said that even though the source of statements like 'descended from David' is scripture, not historical tradition,

"...this does not mean, as Doherty supposes, that the life and the death were not believed to have occurred on earth. The evangelists inferred much of what they took for Jesus' life-history from scripture, but nevertheless set this life in a quite specific historical situation."

Here Wells (and by extension, GDon) is simply begging the question. Whether the life and the

death were believed to have occurred on earth is precisely the point under debate. While we cannot necessarily conclude from the usage of scripture that they were *not*, it needs to be demonstrated that they *were*, and this is extremely difficult to do when it is realized that all the biographical details are indeed supplied from scripture, and are the product of a huge midrashic exercise by the evangelists in virtually all its details. Nor is setting such an exercise in a specific historical situation any indication of belief in basic historicity, as all historical novelists do this. Wells is actually contradicting his own position, because he regards the Pauline Jesus as someone Paul envisioned as having lived in an obscure distant past, not in the time of Pilate, so in that view the evangelists would necessarily have been entirely fabricating such a 'history'.

GDon makes the legitimate point that "to prove that the Gospel message was valid, and that Jesus was the expected Messiah, the early Christian writers had no choice but to draw upon the Hebrew Bible and 'find Christ' in there." But he is thereby getting himself into trouble. If scripture is where Christ is 'found' in the sense of being prophesied (which is what he must mean), an essential element of that exercise would be to demonstrate how such prophetic passages were fulfilled in the actual earthly life of Jesus. It would make no sense to draw on those biographical 'prefigurations' without adding the other half of the presumed equation in actual history. But this is precisely what a whole range of early writers fails to do; and my group of second century apologists fails to engage in the exercise at all. GDon compounds his own fallacy by pointing to Ignatius (whom he erroneously calls an apologist) and Justin Martyr as practitioners of this exercise, but Justin is precisely the apologist whom I identify as the one who has adopted the Gospels as historical, giving him two sides to the equation. Theophilus, Felix, Athenagoras, Tatian do not, and I have focused on this startling contrast. Even Ignatius, whom I have pointed out is the earliest non-Gospel writer to give Gospel-like biographical features to his Christ, fails to directly link such features to specific scriptural passages. His appeal to scripture, as indicated in the quote GDon provides, is more or less 'in spirit' (as well as in the spirit of mythicism), and his biography of Jesus is so threadbare he can scarcely be said to be familiar with any written Gospel, let alone that he had one open before him on his desk. GDon also appeals to the epistle of Barnabas, which stands on the cusp of the equation of scripture with presumed historicity, but even here, there is a perplexing lack of appeal to specific Gospel elements; the few that are claimed to be so are either so general as to be 'historicizing' products of scriptural expectation, or are given interpretations which are at odds with the Gospels as we have them. (See my Supplementary Article No. 12.)

In fact, what GDon has done is selectively appeal to the example of certain writers that are acknowledged to be believers in some form of historical Jesus, and then say by implication: "See, this is what they are *all* doing!" Well, they are *not* all doing it. A vast number of the writers of the first and second centuries do nothing of the sort. And the void in them is deafening. By pointing to the writers who *do* engage in such comparisons, or by appealing to select apologists who *do* present an historical Jesus in their pictures of the faith, GDon only serves to highlight the bizarre nature of those who don't. His strategy of taking one strain of writers who are by definition "HJers" and claiming that this somehow demonstrates that all writers must be the same, is typical of the sort of reasoning traditionally engaged in by New Testament scholarship as a whole. It's like pulling a few apples out of a barrel of fruit, pointing to their characteristics and concluding that the rest of the batch all look and taste the same when an actual sampling of the others tells our senses otherwise. Christianity in its first two centuries was one great barrel of mixed fruit, and only in the third and fourth centuries did it get mashed into one giant purée by the stamping of "orthodox" feet.

Like his "reasons" for the maintaining of silence on the historical Jesus, his "reasons" for the apologists stressing Christianity's roots in the Hebrew Bible are simply beside the point. Even if such factors were in play, they would not have precluded adding an historical Jesus to the mix,

and in fact producing him would have been a more natural and advantageous addition to those roots in the Hebrew Bible than keeping silent on him. If emperors are presumed to have been favorably impressed by figures like Moses and the prophets, why not by a figure like Jesus, especially given the intellectual and literary qualities of writers like Athenagoras who could have offered those comparisons and presented him in the best possible light?

Begging the Logos

GDon asks, "Was there a 'Logos' based Christianity separate from a historical stream?" He claims there is no evidence for it; rather, "the concept [*of the Logos*] was adopted by orthodox Christianity." But this is putting the cart before the horse in the face of all contrary evidence. If "orthodoxy" must be defined as including belief in an historical Jesus and the events of the Gospels, the vast majority of documents from the first century and many from the second show no such sign of such things; they are only to be found there by reading such associations into them. While epistles like the Pauline corpus and Hebrews do not use the term "logos" itself, their philosophy of the Christ and Son is virtually identical to the Greek Logos and to the Wisdom-as-Logos concept of Judaism. That group of apologists I focus on (except for Felix) have the Logos, in concept and word, as central to their religious faith, and only Justin makes a link of such an entity with an historical Jesus. (Tatian does not, contrary to what GDon claims.) Ignatius does, but again, here GDon is appealing to the same two writers who *are* "HJ authors" and demanding that we infer the same is the case with all the rest, who pointedly do not make such a link.

He also gets another horse and cart in the wrong order in saying that, "the gnostics had created their own ideas of how the Logos related to a historical Jesus." The Nag Hammadi library, as interpreted by today's scholarship, shows that the Logos idea existed in gnosticism before an historical Jesus was added to it. Several gnostic systems describing the emanations within the Pleroma (the Godhead in heaven) involved purely spiritual, logos-type entities (one of which was labeled "Christ"); such systems did not always include a descending savior figure, but even when it did (as in the case of Derdekeas and the Third Illuminator), it cannot be seen as an outgrowth from an historical Jesus. When the Gospel figure intruded upon gnostic thought he could not be integrated in human form, so he retained many mythical elements and was usually rendered docetic. GDon speaks of the "controversy" over "whether the Word had become corruptible flesh," but such a controversy is nowhere in evidence during the first century, and I have pointed out that the whole docetic issue is simply a product of the time when an historical human Jesus was introduced and became a problem for the hitherto heavenly Christ who had suffered only in a spiritual form and dimension. Because certain people like Ignatius had no problem in making such a transition, even when surrounded by those who did, Christianity was able to take the momentous step of creating an historical founder who was incarnated in flesh.

GDon's claim that "it isn't coincidence that the Logos became a popular theme to be used in apologies to the Emperor and pagans in the second half of the second century" is again misconstruing the situation. Such a statement would have to imply that styling Jesus as the Logos became advantageous and was introduced at such a time. That would only work if we found all apologists, or at least a majority of them, conforming to such a development. It would only work if Jesus was mentioned. But most of them don't do this. They don't try to make a human founder figure more fashionable or palatable to the pagan by interpreting him in such a manner. They don't point to Jesus as the embodiment of the Logos. They simply *have a Logos* as the pivot of their faith, which is why we can style them as part of a 'Logos religion.' GDon's claim is simply another statement of the traditional rationalization that in speaking of their heavenly Son (as in Colossians 1:15-20 or Hebrews 1:1-3) early Christian writers are offering an *interpretation* of Jesus of Nazareth, which is simply reading something into things that is never even hinted at. In fact, such an "interpretation" on the part of Tatian, Theophilus, and

Athenagoras could not possibly have remained tacit, for why would any pagan be expected to accept without qualm such an identification of their traditional abstract Logos with a human man, especially one who had been a crucified criminal? The idea would strike the pagan as ludicrous. It would require the most vigorous explanation and justification, which no apologist could possibly neglect to supply.

It would also only work if the historical Jesus presentation of the faith preceded the Logos presentation, but this is, of course, far from the case. The entire body of Christian documentation outside the Gospels during the first century has nothing to say about an historical Jesus, but preaches a Logos-style spiritual Son and cultic Redeemer. So we should reasonably conclude that the historical Jesus was added to the Logos—he was a subsequent *interpretation of the Logos* if you like—rather than the other way around. Where the Gospels are concerned, the Logos ("Word") does come at a later stage, but this is an evolution within the Gospel stream itself which had a largely independent origin. In the Gospel of John, it came about through an attempt within the Johannine community to merge their own savior concept with the Synoptic story line.

GDon claims that pagans by the 160s were becoming familiar with the idea of Christian origins (meaning the Gospel story and character) and were rejecting it "as superstition." And so the apologists turned to the Logos as "a useful concept to Christians trying to re-image Christianity as a philosophical school." This, too, flounders on closer examination. Such a "re-imaging" would have to involve Jesus himself, since he was an integral part of the picture: indeed, we have to think that it was precisely his career as Messiah and his reputed resurrection that would have been the object of the accusation of "superstition." Pagans would hardly have regarded belief in a divine offspring (their own religions were full of them), or even the Jewish God, as a superstition, worthy of ridicule. Thus there would be no point in excising Jesus from the picture since he would have been the essential element that had to be dealt with, especially since it could be regarded as deception to simply substitute a 'philosophical' entity, any incarnation ignored, for the traditional human founder pagans were presumably familiar with.

Athenagoras does indeed start his apology with a salutation to the Emperors and to "philosophers." Since he makes a presentation of his faith entirely in terms of a philosophical entity familiar to pagan tradition, the first conclusion should be that this is its sum total, rather than imposing on him the thought of other writers who had gone in different directions from different sources, and accusing him of suppressing it.

Slandering the Christians

GDon spends much space in this article on examining the pagan accusations against Christians during the second century. Yes, much of the concern of the apologists is in countering such accusations, most of them certainly ridiculous or unjustified, but I find this line of argument irrelevant. Again, this should not of itself have required or prompted the apologists to suppress mention of an historical Jesus. Indeed, quite the opposite. Since most of these calumnies related to 'moral' issues, such as incest or libertine behavior, the worship of their priests' genitals, and even cannibalism, and since the apologists are ever at pains to convince their readers that Christians are good and ethical citizens, the most natural way to demonstrate this would have been to appeal to the estimable teachings of their founder, his own exemplary lifestyle, his urgings to an honorable life. While there may be less appealing pronouncements alongside these in Jesus' catalogue, nothing would prevent the apologists from highlighting only the commendable and supportive parts of their traditions about him (something modern preachers do all the time).

One of the commoner pagan fantasies about Christians was their participation in orgiastic "love feasts." Such slanders could have been countered by an account of the Last Supper as Jesus had instituted it. A major commentator on *Minucius Felix*, H. J. Baylis, wonders why Octavius would not have introduced this 'pure and sacramental' event into his response to his opponent's accusations.

A Missing Heresy?

At the core of GDon's rebuttal is an argument which others have seized on as compelling, imagining it to be a virtual refutation of the whole Jesus myth case. Briefly stated, it claims that among all the heresies addressed and condemned in the literature of the second century, there is no mention of a heresy involving a denial of the human Jesus. No sect or branch of Christian faith is accused of not believing in the historical figure of the Gospels, in some form or other. If the mythicist picture were correct, they say, we would expect to find some traces of groups who had not yet evolved to the historicist viewpoint, and these would be roundly condemned by at least some apologists.

On closer examination, this argument can be seen to be porous. First of all, there are indications in epistles around the turn of the second century that there were indeed circles of the faith which denied the fact that Jesus had been on earth. Ignatius, in his insistence that Jesus had truly been born of Mary, baptized by John and crucified by Pilate, condemns those who do not preach such a Christ. Nor is this directed against simple docetism. (I have argued this in an Appendix of *The Jesus Puzzle*.) The first two epistles of John speak of those who do not acknowledge Jesus as having come in the flesh, an argument made by an appeal to the proper "spirit," meaning revelation, not historical tradition; the author refers to such circles of belief as "Antichrist." (See my Supplementary Article No. 2.)

So right at the beginning of the second century we do encounter the existence of such a 'heresy.' As the century progressed, more Christian circles were joining the historical Jesus bandwagon, and full-blown gnosticism reared its head. By the time the apologists turned their attention to attacking the latter, an undertaking that does not begin until after the year 150, many have fallen under the Gospel spell. Early traditions have been reinterpreted. No one who knew of or attached any importance to Paul doubted he was speaking about an historical Jesus; they simply read the Gospels into the epistles, as Christians continue to do. Gnostics like Marcion toward the middle of the century were also assuming that some kind of historical figure lay behind the Gospels, and they were concerned with appropriating him for themselves as a teacher of the true High God behind the Demiurge of the Hebrew Bible. They would have had little motive to deny the existence of an historical figure, even though an earlier writing like the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* (it probably predates 140) shows no presence of a human Jesus, despite the best efforts of scholars like Jacqueline Williams to find allusions to earlier New Testament documents, including the Gospels. By the time we get to Irenaeus and Tertullian, the entire reading of early Christian tradition and writing had been irreparably skewed. Not even Celsus could cut through the tangle and see the Gospel Jesus for what he was, a fictional creation.

For centuries we were dependent on writers like Irenaeus and Tertullian for our picture of the gnostic heresies. Today we can see that so much of what they presented about the beliefs they castigated were distorted by misconception and prejudice. Certainly the presence of savior figures as something that had no connection to Jesus of Nazareth in the developmental stages of those sects was lost to them. And what of the reaction of heresiologists to apologists like Theophilus and Athenagoras and the circles of 'heretical mythicism' they seem to represent? I am aware of no reference at all to any of them by writers in their immediate wake, favorable or unfavorable, so it is quite possible people like Tertullian and Irenaeus had simply not

encountered them. GDon claims that such apologists were well received by subsequent orthodox writers, but the latter were notably later; he mentions Eusebius who who can hardly be relied upon for a dependable reading of what Athenagoras had really been about, a century and a half earlier.

However, there is an aspect to GDon's argument which has been completely overlooked. I will leave the reader hanging, and revisit the question in my Conclusion, in response to his summary comments on it.

Finally, I will throw out the suggestion that the traditional and even modern scholarly datings for some of these apologists, along with their ascriptions as to addressee, may not be accurate. The debate over *Minucius Felix*, for example, has been going on for at least a hundred years, with datings covering almost a century of variance. (I regard the arguments for its primacy over Tertullian's *Apology* and its dating to the neighborhood of 155 as the more compelling.) Scholarly debate over what emperor a given writing was addressed to, even in the presence of one being stated in the text, is not unknown. We know from experience that authorship and provenance of earlier documents by later Christian commentators can be notoriously unreliable and downright fanciful, such things often being added by later editors. Thus our relatively late dating of Theophilus and Athenagoras has to be taken with caution. It may well be that by the time Irenaeus and Tertullian were mounting their high horses in defence of the heresies that beset them all around, circles who still believed in the non-existence of an historical Jesus had virtually died out.

GDon notes that "one of Doherty's MJ writers" (which he has earlier identified as Theophilus) wrote an anti-heresy work against Marcion, now lost. Given the general unreliability of such traditions—this one comes from Eusebius, who declared that a lot of things were known to him, including a letter from Jesus himself to King Abgar of Edessa, which Eusebius quoted from his own copy!—it is risky to formulate any arguments based on unconfirmed attributions of non-extant works. And I was wryly amused at GDon's appeal to Tertullian's inspiration from *Minucius Felix* for his *Apology* as an indicator of how highly regarded this allegedly MJ writer was. Of course, this necessitates an admission that *Felix* was actually the earlier work.

The Catalogue of Apologists

In "Section 2" of his critique, GDon goes on to individual examinations of the several major apologists I deal with. I will be doing some paraphrasing here, as he sometimes provides lengthy passages from my book which I will not reproduce in full. (On the site, the corresponding article is "The Second Century Apologists".)

1. Justin Martyr

GDon finds it "curious" and "incredible" that I would take one section of Justin's *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* and draw a meaning from its silence on Jesus of Nazareth when the rest of the work is full of references to such a figure. (This, of course, is exactly what he does in regard to two works by Tertullian, as I've noted above.) However, in this case, I maintain it is justified. In the opening chapters of *Trypho*, Justin is recounting his conversion, an episode that happened in the past. The account (even if it is only allegorical—some have suggested that the old man he meets by the sea is a metaphor for the Logos itself) reflects his thinking at that earlier time, and while one can't deny that it may be curious that Justin would not have recast that thinking in light of his later views, it is fortunate for us that he did not. The greater curiosity, in fact, is that two such contrasting sections within the same work do exist. Why, indeed, does Justin not present his conversion experience, and the ideas that contributed to it, in terms that include an historical

Jesus? Any of the reasons GDon suggests, such as Justin's purpose being concerned with philosophical arguments, should apply to the work as a whole. If he could include Jesus within that purpose in the bulk of the document, why not to his account of his conversion experience? If he felt no qualms anywhere else, why would they be operating here? The only explanation which makes sense to me is that Justin, for whatever reason, consciously or not, has preserved the actual state of affairs at the time of his conversion and has not contaminated it with later developments in his thinking through encountering the Gospels. One cannot 'prove' that this is what happened, but the possibility is not "incredible," especially in view of the comparable evidence we find in other apologists who are entirely silent on an historical Jesus. Justin came out of the same school of philosophical thought as the others; only he went on to embrace the Gospel Jesus where they did not. (Tatian was apparently to do so, but only after writing his own apology.)

Let me go into more detail about this conversion account than I did in the book. In Chapter 7 of *Trypho*, the old man is speaking about "teachers" of the philosophy of body and soul they have been discussing. Justin has asked if it is best to employ one, seeing that so many pagan philosophers have, in the old man's view, been deficient in their insights. The old man points to the Hebrew prophets "who spoke by the Divine Spirit" and foretold events that are now happening.

"They [*meaning the prophets*] were entitled to credit on account of the miracles which they performed, since they both glorified the Creator, the God and Father of all things, and proclaimed His Son, the Christ [sent] by Him; which, indeed, the false prophets, who are filled with the lying unclean spirit, neither have done nor do, but venture to work certain wonderful deeds for the purpose of astonishing men, and glorify the spirits and demons of error. But pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom." [*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p.198]

This is the translation from which GDon quotes the part involving the first reference to the Christ. When he goes on to claim that "Justin makes clear in the text that *the ancient prophets proclaimed a HJ*," he seems to be basing this in part on the implications of the "sent" word. But this is the product of the translator; it is not in the Greek text. The Greek reads: "(they glorified the Father) *kai ton par' autou Xriston huion autou katēngellon*". While it is difficult to translate this phrase literally, there is no word for "sent"; this is an implication supplied by the translator (which is why it was placed in square brackets). The idea expressed is simply "proclaimed the Christ from him (*par' autou*), his Son." The "from him" is by no means a clear or strong reference to "sending" the Son to earth in incarnated form, as GDon would like it to be. In fact, in the spirit of a Logos religion, it seems to be a reference to the 'emanation' aspect of the Christ and Son. When Justin goes on (at the end of the above quote) to speak of this Christ as imparting wisdom, this is not a necessary reference to a teaching Christ on earth; it is simply the common thought in virtually all expressions of Logos philosophy, that the Logos/Christ is the *channel*—a spiritual one—through which God makes knowledge of himself known and acts upon the world. He does this through his emanations, and the fundamental aspect of Logos religion is that it "proclaims" the existence of such an emanation. This is the "Son," through whose revelatory activity salvation comes. When Justin a few sentences later [8.2] refers to "the words of the Savior," this is "*tōn tou sōtēros logōn*" which is a common way of expressing the 'teaching' that comes from scripture, regarded as the voice and channel of the Son. We find such ideas, for example, in 1 Clement and the epistle to the Hebrews and alluded to in The Odes of Solomon.

But here is the point I am leading up to. If, as GDon claims, Justin and the old man are speaking of an historical Christ on earth, why is a specific reference to this divine "teacher" notably

missing in their discussion of teachers? Justin has asked about the necessity and value of teachers of philosophy, about who should be consulted to provide insight into the great questions they are addressing. What is the old man's answer? He points to the Hebrew prophets. "These *alone* both saw and announced the truth to men" [my emphasis]. Where is the earthly Jesus in this category? How could the old man, or Justin, have left him out? He even (see the above quote) disparages the miracle-working of "false prophets" who seek to astonish men, something very reminiscent of *Minucius Felix's* oblivious derogation of supposed features associated with Jesus.

GDon appeals to the opening lines of Chapter 8: "When he had spoken these and many other things, which there is no time for mention at present..." Could not Christ's earthly mission, he asks, be the "many other things" referred to? Well, usually one mentions the most important factors and relegates the minor ones to non-specific tags like this. Somehow, I find it difficult to see all reference to Christ's earthly career as minor and unimportant. In any case, we don't know. And it's yet another appeal to the possible existence of things we don't actually have, but which would bolster one's case if we did have them.

That same opening section of Chapter 8 also contains indicators that Justin at this time had no particular conception of an historical Jesus. I mention these in my book, but one merits a fuller quote:

"But straightaway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me."

It seems odd that Justin would not speak of feeling a love for Christ himself. Odd, unless this is because he had as yet no sense of Christ as a distinct, let alone human, entity, an historical man capable of being "loved" as one would love the prophets—no more than Philo would say that he "loved" the Logos with the same emotion and admiration he felt toward Moses. Philo regarded the Logos as an abstraction, and while Justin's and the other apologists' type of Logos may have evolved somewhat beyond this, Justin in his conversion account, and the others in their entire works, express no emotion toward the Christ; he is simply a philosophically envisioned aspect of God. (By contrast, the composer of the Odes of Solomon expresses much love for the Son and Word; this is an earlier and probably independent expression of the faith, a set of devotional hymns, not an apology, which nevertheless presents no human or sacrificial Son, nor uses the name "Jesus." Its venue is thought to be the region of Edessa in northern Syria.)

GDon also makes reference to a "later" statement by Justin, that "Of these and such like words written by the prophets...some have reference to the first advent of Christ..." But this statement comes in Chapter 14, much later than the conversion account. To try to have it cast light on the darkness in the earlier chapter is a stretch, especially since there is no connection implied. The remark is merely part of the post-Gospel phase of Justin's thinking, the setting in which his dialogue with Trypho takes place, when he had reinterpreted everything in his Logos religion in terms of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus, I once again have to disagree with GDon's summary assessment that my conclusion "that Justin converted first to a philosophical Christianity devoid of a historical Jesus" is "nonsensical" and something which "defies logic." I will also take exception to his claim that I have "badly misread" the well-known statement by Trypho at the end of Chapter 8:

"But Christ—if He has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown, and does not even know Himself, and has not power until Elias come to anoint Him, and make Him manifest to all. And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves, and for his sake are inconsiderately perishing."

It is true that *within the context of the scenario Justin is presenting*, Trypho would have to mean that the "invention of a Christ" refers to the making of a Christ out of the historical Jesus, who is a figure Justin believes in and is the pivot of his discussion with Trypho—outside the conversion account. (GDon mentions the supportive "Note on Trypho" by Peter Kirby, who discusses the meaning of the passage in these terms, within the scenario presented by the text.) But we must look beyond the text and take into account that this dialogue, together with the figure of Trypho, is a construction of Justin. The fact that he would make his character put things this way, with this meaning, does not guarantee that this is what the real Jewish world was saying. The very fact that he has included it in his dialogue indicates that it must reflect something which was being said against the Christians. But the very vagueness of the passage, the fact that clear reference to an historical Jesus is lacking, may well indicate that the accusation was more in keeping with my suggestion, that the invention of "a Christ for yourselves" was out of whole cloth. Justin, in transferring this into his dialogue, has given it an historical Jesus context.

There is virtually nothing in the above quoted passage which, taken out of the scenario of the *Dialogue*, would require us to accept GDon's (or Kirby's) contention as to its meaning. Trypho is stating what would certainly be the Jewish requirements for identifying anyone as the Messiah; at the present time no one knows, so the Jews would claim, whether the Messiah has yet come into the world. The Jews could well declare that, because such requirements have not been met in anyone, the Christians (of the sort Justin represents) have invented their own false Messiah, in their declaration of him in the form of a recent human man. Again, this does not mean that they were referring to this man as historical. In fact, the "invented a Christ for yourselves" conveys the opposite.

The only element of Trypho's statement which might disturb such an interpretation is the phrase, "having accepted a groundless report," since this could refer to traditions, or assumed common knowledge, about the historical man in question. But it could equally refer to the Gospels or other written or oral reports which were *not* regarded as authentic, and thus the passage, if it reflects fairly accurately the things being said in the world at large, could as easily indicate that there *were* common opinions being voiced against the Christians that they had simply invented their Christ, lock, stock and humanity. Thus it is not entirely a "misreading," let alone a bad one. However, there is simply no way of resolving the question. To that extent, I overstated the idea that the passage *supports* the existence of a non-historical Christ.

2. Tatian

GDon is not the only one who appeals to the fact that Tatian was, by tradition, Justin's "pupil." They all use it to draw the conclusion that Tatian must therefore have followed Justin in all things and adopted all of his views. But our meager knowledge of their relationship does not justify such a conclusion. We only have the tradition voiced by Irenaeus and Tertullian that Tatian was a disciple/hearer of Justin. We have no record of the course of Tatian's tutorship, when exactly it began or finished, how intense it may have been, what degree of influence Justin had on him compared to other inputs, and so on. All we have is a single writing by Tatian, and in it he is silent on Justin as his teacher. In fact, he makes mention of Justin exactly twice (which hardly justifies GDon's claim that it is "several times"). The first, in Chapter 18, states that "the most admirable Justin has rightly denounced (the demons) as robbers." (This the ANF translator claims in a footnote is "the language of an affectionate pupil," which is simply wishful thinking and an application of tradition, as there is no necessary association of *thaumasiōtatos* with a teacher-pupil relationship.) The second is even less significant, a remark in Chapter 19 about a certain official who "endeavored to inflict on Justin, and indeed on me, the punishment of death." These are pretty slim pickings. Tatian speaks of his conversion through reading the Jewish

scriptures, but nowhere does he suggest that Justin had anything to do with it, or with teaching him what he believes. The fact that Tatian went on later to compose the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four Gospels which is not extant, says nothing about his earlier state of mind, or whether this 'conversion' to the Gospels was due to the delayed influence of Justin.

What we are left with is a comparison of Tatian's thought, as expressed in his *Address to the Greeks*, with the writings of Justin. GDon claims that "not unexpectedly, Tatian uses the same concepts as his teacher, Justin." While there are certainly similarities of expression in the examples from the two writers, one cannot say that Tatian derived them directly from Justin; Logos philosophy permeated the era, and could well have been the source of both men's ideas. Even if Tatian wrote about the Logos due to his exposure to Justin, this creates no necessary link between them in any other area. GDon admits that "it is possible that Tatian adopted Justin's terminology and still rejected Justin's view of a historical Jesus," but he adds: "there is no evidence that this occurred" (which I assume refers only to the latter phrase). Surely this has things backwards. Evidence is required that Tatian *adopted* Justin's view of an historical Jesus, and this is in fact precisely what is missing, since Tatian has nothing to say about such a figure, and puts forward in his *Address to the Greeks* none of the views of Justin regarding the human Jesus. And if we *were* to search for "evidence" that Tatian rejected Justin's view, what form would it take? It's not likely we would get a statement from him to that effect. Surely such evidence would take the form of precisely what we find in the *Address*: the deliberate failure to include any of the direct identification of Jesus with the Logos, any appeal to the events of Jesus' ministry, to the Gospels themselves to illustrate aspects of his life and nature—in short, all the things which Justin openly and enthusiastically includes in his own picture of the Logos-Christ.

In regard to both writers' passages on the resurrection, I made the point that Tatian does not appeal to Jesus' resurrection as support for his contention that resurrection of dead bodies is possible (Chapter 6). GDon presented a passage from Justin (*First Apology*, Chapter 19) showing that in similar circumstances Justin also does not appeal to Jesus' resurrection. To some extent, the comparison is valid, though Justin is focusing on his readers' experiences, which include the fact that they "have never seen a dead man rise again." It would do little good to appeal to Jesus' resurrection, since this is something they would never have seen either. But contrast this with the extant fragments from Justin's lost work *On the Resurrection* (which GDon doesn't mention). Here the circumstances are also similar. "They who maintain the wrong opinion say that there is no resurrection of the flesh" [Chapter 2]. After a number of philosophical arguments, Justin goes where Tatian and the other apologists never tread:

"And what is most forcible of all, He raised the dead. Why? Was it not to show what the resurrection should be?... Why did He rise in the flesh in which He suffered, unless to show the resurrection of the flesh?... And when he had thus shown them [the apostles] that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh...he was taken up into heaven while they beheld, as He was in the flesh. If therefore, after all that has been said, any one demand demonstration of the resurrection..." [9]

This appeal to Jesus' own resurrection is something we do not get from Tatian, or from Theophilus (not even in response to Autolykus' demand, "Show me even one who has been raised from the dead!"), or from Athenagoras, who wrote a 25-chapter treatise on the resurrection of the dead.

What follows from GDon is somewhat confused. He quotes me: "In Tatian's Apology we find a few allusions to Gospel sayings, but no specific reference to written Gospels and no attribution of such things to Jesus." He wonders what significance I draw from this, in view of the fact that I elsewhere admit that Tatian does make reference to "something like the Gospels." The "significance" here is that Tatian does not *appeal* to them in making any of his arguments, does

not attribute to Jesus the teachings he alludes to, which is something we need to keep in mind when looking at that reference. GDon then notes that Justin also doesn't specifically name any Gospels, referring to them as "memoirs of the apostles." But this *is* the 'naming' of them. He doesn't know any other names, certainly not the names of reputed authors which only appear later in Irenaeus. (Papias' reputed references to Matthew and Mark are not to any narrative Gospels.) The fact that I acknowledge Justin as being familiar with one or more Gospels is not a contradiction. The glaring contradiction is that Justin regularly appeals to these "memoirs," regularly points to Jesus' teachings as his product, to the events of Jesus' life, which is something that the other apologists we are examining fail to do.

On the key question of what Tatian is referring to in chapter 21 of his apology, there seems to be more confusion. GDon quotes me as allowing that Tatian's statement "Compare your own stories with our narratives" is a probable reference to Christian Gospels, then he goes on to argue as though I *don't* make such an admission. The primary question is *not* what is Tatian referring to by "our narratives." We both agree, it's some form of Gospel. Rather, the question is, does Tatian regard these as on the same level as the Greek myths? I maintain that the text indicates he does, GDon maintains otherwise. I prefer the translation of Molly Whittaker [*Tatian*, 1982], less flowery and more direct than the Victorian ANF:

"We are not fools, men of Greece, nor are we talking nonsense when we declare that God has been born in the form of man. You who abuse us should compare your own stories with our narratives... So take a look at your own records and accept us merely on the grounds that we too tell stories. We are not foolish, but you talk nonsense [*kai hēmeis men ouk aphrainomen, phlēnapha de ta humetera*]...."

The statements prior to the last sentence would certainly convey the idea that Tatian is making a general equation of the Greek stories with the Christian narratives. Accept us because we too tell stories. Despite GDon's denial, my statement is accurate that neither here nor anywhere else does Tatian rush to point out that the Christian stories are "factually true." This is a devastating silence. I have also said that he doesn't rush to declare them "superior" to those of the Greeks. GDon thinks to read the last sentence above as doing just that. I see it as not much more than a schoolyard taunt. "You call *us* foolish? *You* are the foolish ones!" If Tatian were really concerned with pointing out the superiority of the Christian fables to the Greek ones, or their actual historicity, I think he was capable of doing it in a more sophisticated fashion—and more obviously. He goes into some detail in itemizing the legends of the Greeks, which he accuses of being ridiculous if taken seriously, and he asks how they can mock those of the Christians. This may be the most telling remark of all, for how, on the question of whether legends are to be taken seriously or simply as 'stories,' can Tatian not address the question of how the Gospel accounts are to be taken? And do it by more than just "We are not foolish"? It is probably true that Tatian thinks the Greek legends have the greater degree of foolishness, but he has hardly advanced any perceivable case for regarding the Gospel tales as being in a different category—which would certainly be his opinion and his impulse to do if he were a believer in the historicity of Jesus and the reality of the account of his life.

This is typical apologetic argumentation. Ignore the glaring discrepancies, in this case the complete lack of any mention or appeal to the Gospels or the figure of Jesus as support for Tatian's case throughout his work, and focus on some minor and at best ambiguous detail that can be twisted into supporting the apologist's stance. (The same, as we shall see, is done for *Minucius Felix*.) Peeling a flake of skin off the elephant's hide does not remove it from the room.

Finally, GDon appeals to Tertullian in the same misleading way he did earlier. From Chapter 21 of Tertullian's *Apology*, he quotes:

"Receive meanwhile this fable [this ray of God born of a virgin, grown to manhood, etc.], if you choose to call it so—it is like some of your own—while we go on to show you Christ's claims are proved..."

GDon has seized on Tertullian's remark that the Christian "fable" (and he is calling it that because his readers do so) is like those of the Greeks; he claims that this is the same as what Tatian has done, ignoring the fact that Tertullian goes on to do what Tatian does not. He appeals in great detail in that chapter to elements of the Gospel story, in ways which leave no doubt that he regards them as worthy, factual and superior to the Greek myths. He says he will go on to prove the validity of those beliefs about Christ. The beam is overlooked while the splinter is removed. GDon's comparison is invalid because the more important considerations are *not* paralleled between the two apologists. Tatian's lack of what Tertullian includes is precisely what sets them apart.

3. Theophilus

As GDon progresses from one apologist to the next, he repeats many of the same arguments. Rather than this creating a cumulative strengthening effect, the weaknesses in such arguments only become the more obvious. The misleading appeal to Tertullian's *Ad Nationes* I have dealt with earlier. There is more dubious reasoning when GDon claims that, even though Theophilus presents ethical teachings from "the gospels" as the inspired word of God (meaning the evangelists have them through inspiration), even though such teachings are said to be of the gospels and not of Jesus, pagans would know they were from Jesus because, like Celsus, they were familiar with such teachings in the Gospels. Theophilus' readers would know what he was talking about (nudge, nudge, wink, wink). This plainly creates a contradiction. On the one hand, Theophilus, along with his companion apologists, were supposedly deliberately silent on the historical Jesus because the subject was anathema to the pagans, but on the other hand, they knew that pagans were familiar with Jesus already and would simply interpret what they wrote in terms of him. Apparently this is some form of ancient *Da Vinci Code*. GDon goes on to make this outrageous statement: "I suggest that the primary question isn't 'why doesn't Theophilus refer directly to Christ,' but 'what do we understand from what he is saying?'" His position seems to be that it is no longer incumbent on modern scholars to offer an explanation for the silence; rather it becomes a case of what can we read into the words in keeping with our own assumptions. This, of course, is the methodology of traditional New Testament scholarship in regard to all the documents, not just the second century apologists.

On the thorny question of why (quoting me) "Theophilus has not a thing to say about this Word's incarnation into flesh, or any deed performed by him on earth," the strategy all along regarding such silences is to force the desired meaning onto whatever passages one can, no matter how obscure the possibility or how strained the process. GDon suggests that Theophilus *does* claim that the Logos acted on earth and points to Chapter 22:

"The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place."

This obscurely worded verse is elucidated by what leads up to it. Theophilus is explaining that, while God Himself cannot contain himself in a specific 'place' (which is why philosophers felt he needed an aspect of himself, namely the Logos, to do so and communicate with the world), the Word *could* so contain itself. An example of this was the Word's visitation to Eden to converse with Adam; the voice Adam heard was that of the Word, God's Son. But Theophilus is hardly saying that this visitation to Eden was an incarnation; it was simply the voice of a spiritual entity

who could "contain himself" in Eden. GDon has no justification for regarding the above quote, which concludes this whole passage, as anything but a statement of the same thing. The spiritual Son and Word is "sent" whenever and wherever God needs him, in a spiritual form to communicate with human beings. (The New Testament epistles are full of this kind of language.) GDon could not be more misguided than to claim that, "It certainly appears to be an indication of the Word being *physically active on earth*, and...is almost certainly an expression of the incarnation." It appears to be nothing of the sort.

Not only has GDon simply forced the meaning he wants on a passage that will not bear it, he ignores other aspects of it. Following on the verse saying that the Word is God's Son, Theophilus remarks:

"Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [*the translator adds: with women*], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God."

Here is a perfect example of the type of 'denial' of an historical Jesus that can be seen within so much of what the apologists write. How can Theophilus state that this Word and Son is *not* to be thought of in the manner of gods that are born on earth, when in fact this was precisely the case with the historical Jesus? How can he go on to define the 'Word/Son' entirely in terms of Logos philosophy, as though the whole incarnational aspect of the Word simply doesn't exist for him? Elsewhere in his work, Theophilus ridicules the pagan for believing that his gods Heracles and Aesclepius were raised from the dead [1.13]; he tells Autolycus that the Christian doctrine is not recent, that it is "not modern or fabulous but ancient and true" [3.26]; another good example of the outright *exclusion* of an historical Jesus is this astounding statement [2.33]: "And therefore it is proved that all others have been in error; and that we Christians alone have possessed the truth, inasmuch as we are taught by the Holy Spirit, who spoke in the holy prophets and foretold all things."

Theophilus' attitude toward the "gospels" is certainly curious. He treats them as inspired documents, not historical records and never mentions their central character. I suggested that his one reference to an evangelist, "John" [2.22], may be a marginal gloss, since he gives no other authorial name and elsewhere always treats such sources collectively. GDon claims that "a reference to a named Gospel of John would appear to be conclusive evidence establishing Theophilus as an orthodox Christian," but this is ignoring a great deal of contrary evidence, including the fact that in a following chapter [2.27] Theophilus declares that "everyone who keeps God's law and commandments can be saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit incorruption." This is salvation by knowledge of God and his laws, which is a hallmark of the Logos religion. The 'orthodox' Atonement doctrine is completely missing here. Theophilus can hardly be aware of, or subscribe to, Jesus' declaration in the Gospel of John that "I am the Resurrection and the Life"—meaning that he himself is the only avenue to salvation. Again, these are the sorts of things throughout the apologists that GDon and others simply ride roughshod over.

Finally, GDon claims that, since Theophilus is reported to have written a work against the heresy of Marcion, he finds it improbable that he could have composed such a thing without betraying his lack of belief in an historical Jesus. And where does that report come from? Eusebius, a century and half later. I've already commented on the reliability of traditions proceeding from later Christian times, and from Eusebius in particular. In any case, we can only judge the content of a work by having access to it, and there are no extant fragments.

4. Athenagoras

Athenagoras, too, is full of those exclusionary silences. In Chapter 10 of his *A Plea for the Christians*, he gives the emperor a detailed picture of the Son and Logos, one of the finest we have in all of ancient literature, as though in answer to a question: "if you inquire what is meant by the Son." There is no mention of an incarnated Jesus, and Athenagoras wraps up his description with "If I go minutely into the particulars of our doctrine, let it not surprise you." If I had been the emperor, I would have had the apologist hauled before me and executed for telling me such a bare-faced lie. He has also lied to me in Chapter 11:

"For presenting the opinions themselves to which we adhere, as being not human, but uttered and taught by God... What, then, are those teachings in which we are brought up? 'I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust'."

GDon is not the only one to claim that this shows Athenagoras' knowledge of Matthew, but there is no guarantee of this. Athenagoras never refers to a 'gospel' in the sense of a written source, and in Chapter 32, he says: "For the Logos again says to us..." and he goes on to present some unknown dictum about the evils of kissing. This is in line with the language of the quote above, that these teachings are from a divine source, God himself through the channel of the Word, which is said to be a "not human" source. While they may be circulating in a documentary collection (possibly with no attribution), Athenagoras seems not to hold the opinion that they are the product of an historical teacher and founder of the faith. He quite clearly says the opposite, and directly to the emperor's face.

Moreover, here the apologist has missed a golden opportunity. He presents such teachings with pride, and they would no doubt strike an emperor like Marcus Aurelius (if he indeed was the one being addressed) as laudable. If Athenagoras thinks that the Christian ethical code demonstrates moral superiority, why not present it as the product of Jesus and raise the founder's stock in pagan eyes?

In one of the most devastating passages in all the apologists, Athenagoras clearly demonstrates that he will have no truck with any divine incarnation in flesh. Chapter 21 is a rant against the anthropomorphic qualities of the Greek gods:

"But should it be said that they only had fleshly forms, and possess blood and seed, and the affections of anger and sexual desire, even then we must regard such assertions as nonsensical and ridiculous; for there is neither anger, nor desire and appetite, nor procreative seed, in gods....Let them, then, have fleshly forms, but let them be superior to wrath and anger....Let them have fleshly forms, but let not Aphrodite be wounded by Diomedes in her body....Do they not pour forth impious stuff of this sort in abundance concerning the gods?...Are they not in love? Do they not suffer? Nay, verily, they are gods, and desire cannot touch them! Even though a god assume flesh in pursuance of a divine purpose, he is therefore the slave of desire...He is created, he is perishable, with no trace of a god in him."

This passage rivals those of *Minucius Felix* for the open denigration of features of the Greek myths which are supposedly paralleled by those of orthodox Christian faith about Jesus. Does Athenagoras know the Gospel of Matthew, yet accept its descriptions of Jesus' righteous anger against all and sundry, from Pharisees to fig trees? Can he embrace the event of Jesus' crucifixion and the bloody punishment of his body? Would he declare to the emperor that when gods assume flesh they are slaves of desire, that they lose all trace of being gods, without arguing for the exception that an incarnated Jesus would surely have to be accorded? If the apologist is

trying to demonstrate the follies of gods who take on flesh, should not a qualification be to demonstrate by Jesus' example how a divinity incarnated into flesh *should* comport himself? One wonders how the condemnation of such features of pagan faith which apologists regularly indulge in would strike the pagan believer, or even the emperor, when those even moderately familiar with orthodox Christian tradition would no doubt see a parallel with the apologists' own presumed beliefs. The confusion and skepticism that would be generated in the reader would surely foil any purpose the apologist had in presenting his radically censored "defense of the faith."

None of these things disturb a modern apologist like L.W. Barnard (*Athenagoras*) who manages to pilot his little ship with the Gospel-colored windows amid the treacherous shoals that beset his course through this document, and emerge unscathed. GDon is a no less cheerful proponent of the doctrine that black is white, and that what the writer means is the direct opposite of what he is saying.

5. The Epistle To Diognetus

This little apology, whose date, author and provenance are uncertain, inhabits the same world of the Logos-Son as the others, but the faint and indistinct image of an additional dimension seems to emerge from the mist. I have said that it contains an allusion to incarnation, but on further examination I am now going to retreat from that suggestion. In chapter 7, the writer tells us:

"...God Himself...has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts....As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us..."

Might this be an incarnation in flesh? Compare Baruch 3:37 which says, "Thereupon Wisdom appeared on earth and lived among men." Is this incarnation? Not in any scholar's view. (Because it doesn't relate to Jesus, common sense can take precedence over confessional theology.) The epistles regularly speak of the Son being "sent," and there is precious little sense of earthly incarnation. Galatians 4:6 has the "spirit" of the Son being sent into people's hearts, very much like the above sentiment that the Word has been sent from heaven and established in the human heart. Spiritual Saviors were often sent to humanity in ancient world religious thought. Nor does Chapter 9, with its allusion to an atonement doctrine, cast any clearer light on the question:

"He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous [etc.]"

Is this the Gospel crucifixion, a death on Calvary? There is nothing earthly about it. In fact, it is derived from Isaiah 53. It could as easily be a mythical concept inspired by scripture, nothing more. Considering that there is no reference anywhere in this 'epistle' to gospels, to the name Jesus, to an historical time or place, there is little to justify seeing the idea as dependent on any historical tradition whatever. Thus, we have an unusual situation in this particular document which should cause modern apologists some concern. After all, they have explained the silence in writers like Theophilus as a strategy of concealing the historical Jesus and all reference to the 'superstitious doctrine' about his death. Yet this writer has supposedly opened the door a bit; an apparent human man who underwent some form of sacrifice is allowed to emerge ever so faintly from the shadows. If he could take Jesus this far out of the closet, why not all the way? Wouldn't this partial revelation create more questions for the readers?

Or is it the case that this writer and his community have simply developed an additional idea about the Son and Logos they worship, an idea they have taken from certain scriptural passages. As yet, they have developed no details about a life on earth—if indeed they envision such a thing. As suggested above, perhaps this Son has been sent only into believers' consciousness, into their hearts; perhaps the act of ransom (it is never more specified than that) took place in the spiritual world, like those of other savior gods. In fact, the similarity to New Testament epistle language comes clearly into focus later in chapter 9:

"Having therefore convinced us in the former time that our nature was unable to attain to life, and having now revealed the Saviour who is able to save even those things which it was [formerly] impossible to save, by both these facts He [*i.e.*, *God*] desired to lead us to trust in His kindness, to esteem Him our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light, Honour, Glory, Power, and Life, so that we should not be anxious concerning clothing and food."

There are lights flashing all over this passage, and they do not illuminate an historical Jesus. What has happened in the present time? Like the New Testament epistles' mode of expression, it is not the coming of the Son to earth, but the *revealing* of him. The "revealed" verb above is *deiknumi*: to show, present, to make known, to announce. This virtually guarantees that the "sending" of the Savior spoken of in Chapter 7 is a spiritual one, a *revelation* of the Son. Incarnation, a birth on earth, would simply not be described this way. Then we note that, again like much other early Christian expression, the Son acts in the present, not in the past. Now that he has been revealed, he *is* able to save. No event in the past is alluded to as the saving act. Again like the New Testament epistles, the focus is on God as the primary agent of salvation. The writer gives him a long list of titles, and all his emotion is directed toward him, as it is throughout the work. No titles, no thanks, no emotion is bestowed on the Son himself, a coldness we find in other apologists' writing about the Logos. Could this writer really have any knowledge of a Jesus of Nazareth who had bled and died for him outside Jerusalem? As for a resurrection, there is not a word of it breathed throughout the entire epistle.

Even in Chapters 11 and 12, which are generally regarded as a later addition to this work, what do we find? Does this appendix perhaps reflect the development of some idea of an historical Jesus? This is the relevant passage:

"I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth. For who that is rightly taught and begotten by the loving Word [*or*, and becoming a friend to the Word], would not seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to His disciples, to whom the Word being manifested has revealed them, speaking plainly [to them], not understood indeed by the unbelieving, but conversing with the disciples, who, being esteemed faithful by Him, acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father. For which reason He sent the Word, that He might be manifested to the world; and He, being despised by the people [of the Jews], was, when preached by the Apostles, believed on by the Gentiles...."

As in the previous passage we looked at above, there are flashing lights here as well. Many will point to the idea of Apostles of the word (I am reproducing here the capital "A" simply as a feature of the ANF translation), but what indicators are there that this is a reference to the Gospel apostles of an historical Jesus? The answer is none; in fact, quite the opposite. Just as earlier the idea of the Word being "sent" looked to be in the spiritual sense, the same is true here. The key indicator is the phrase "to whom the Word being manifested has revealed them." The verb for "being manifested" is *phaneroō*, to bring to light, make known, the most common revelation word of the New Testament epistles. The Word is being revealed to "disciples," which is simply those who subscribe to such a faith and philosophy; through this spiritual revelation of the Word (with whom they "converse") they have "acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father."

There isn't the slightest suggestion of an earthly ministry here. God has "sent" the Word so that he might "be manifested" to the world: *phainō*, yet another revelation verb: to appear, become visible, to be brought to light. This revelation of the Word, and the preaching of it by "Apostles," has not been accepted by everyone. The writer declares that he was despised by the people (*hupo laou*); the translator adds "of the Jews," which is sometimes the implication of the word *laos*. Even if this is the meaning here, there is no necessary connection with the Gospel story and its Jews rejecting Jesus. The writer is simply contrasting the reception of the idea of the Word by the gentiles with that of the Jews. The former had proven much more receptive to the idea, no doubt because of the longstanding Logos tradition in Greek philosophy.

The writer goes on to describe the revealed Word:

"This is He who was from the beginning, who appeared [*phainō*, brought to light] as if new, and was found old, and yet who is ever born afresh in the hearts of the saints."

This is hardly a description of a life on earth. When the Word was revealed in recent times as though a new idea, the claim was that he was in fact old, existing with God from the beginning. He is ever "born" in the hearts of believers, a thought squarely in tune with all that has been said about the Word being sent and revealed. There is nothing of an incarnational birth. It is all a spiritual relationship between heaven and earth, between divine entities and human believers.

GDon speaks of "hints" of an incarnation, because he can find nothing else, a perplexing state of affairs in itself. Yet even those hints do not relate to an historical Jesus or a life on earth. They point collectively, consistently and logically to the non-historical nature of early Christian faith as reflected in so much of the documentary record. How long will it take modern scholarship to wake from its self-imposed sleep and smell the scent of mythicism?

For now, we will investigate the scent of burnt powder, in the document I have called "a smoking gun."

6. Minucius Felix

GDon makes no attempt to deal with the following passages in *Minucius Felix*, all of them relating to the ridicule by the Christian Octavius of pagan beliefs in their gods:

"Is it not ridiculous either to grieve for what you worship, or to worship that over which you grieve?" [21, ANF translation]

"Therefore neither are gods made from dead people, since a god cannot die; nor of people that are born, since everything which is born dies....For why, if they [*i.e.*, gods] were born, are they not born in the present day also?" [23, ANF translation]

"Why should I refer to those old wives' fables, of men being changed into birds and beasts, into trees and flowers? If such things had ever happened, they would happen now; but since they cannot happen now, they have never happened." [20, J.H. Freese translation]

"And yet, although so much time has elapsed and countless ages have passed, is there a single trustworthy instance of a man having returned from the dead like Protesilaus, if only for a few hours? All these figments of a disordered brain, these senseless consolations invented by lying poets to lend a charm to their verse, to your shame you have hashed up in your excessive credulity in honor of your god." [11, J.H. Freese translation]

I don't need to belabor the point that all these references supposedly have direct parallels in the

Christian faith and (if we are to believe apologists like GDon) were part and parcel of the writer's own faith. And yet he could have his Christian character speak with scorn of the exact same things in the religion of the pagans without any worry over what effect this scorn would have on the identical features of his own. How could the author place such statements in the mouth of his Christian debater and give himself no luxury of offering any qualification where Jesus was concerned? H. J. Baylis (*Minucius Felix*, 1928) frets over several of these. Concerning the third quote above, he says: "Minucius, strangely enough, seems to be sublimely unconscious of what his dictum would mean if applied to the miracles of Christ." About the second, he says: "...without the insertion of a saving clause, what Christian could assent to the proposition that 'a god cannot die, and he cannot be born, since birth implies death'?" And on the fourth: "The most serious omission is a very surprising one...Here was the opening made wide for the entrance of the historic fact of the resurrection of Christ, the central point of the apostolic Evangel. But the Christian Octavius ignores it." Baylis at least has the courage to voice his qualms—and he has further ones on the crucified man passage—but he allows none of it to lead him to an insight on the real nature of the document he is studying.

We might also note that there is a further silence involved here. The pagan Caecilius denigrates the idea that Christians worship a crucified man and his cross, which Octavius replies to as we shall see, but why is there no similar accusation on the part of Caecilius that the Christians also worship a man who they believe rose from the dead? Why does he not challenge Octavius to defend this ridiculous item of faith along with that of the crucified man?

The simple answer to all these questions is that none of these items of faith familiar to us from Gospel orthodoxy were a part of the beliefs of the writer of *Minucius Felix*. No other explanation makes any sense.

GDon focuses his whole attention on the key double-passage relating to the crucified man. Let's note a few general observations about it. The first part is the accusation itself by Caecilius, in Chapter 9. The charge that

"the objects of their worship include a man who suffered death as a criminal, as well as the wretched wood of his cross"

is part of a litany of calumnies about the Christians which include that they are a religion of lust and fornication, that they reverence the head of an ass and the genitals of their priests, that they dismember infants and drink their blood. The crucified man is inserted into the midst of these. I suggest that presenting the central tenet of the faith in this way should have been unthinkable for an orthodox Christian writer.

When he gets to the second part in Chapter 28-30, Octavius' response to this litany, the crucified man is dealt with in the same fashion, as one part of the answer to all these calumnies. No special treatment is accorded it. The time spent on it is cursory. No devotional tone is present. Octavius simply addresses it in its order on the list. Again, why would the author do this? If nothing else, what impression would this create with his readers? If such an accusation needed to be addressed, there would have been no reason not to give it a special place of its own within his debate, and every reason to do so. GDon does not address this glaring anomaly.

Instead, he, like everyone else, focuses on the crucified man element of the two passages, taking the words apart, imposing twists and spins on them in whatever way he can, in a valiant and desperate effort to squeeze out meanings and implications which are not there. I will reproduce the latter passage in full here. (GDon intimates that since he understands that this is my translation, there should be something suspicious about it. But it is my own only in the sense that

I have melded three different translations of others to create the simplest and clearest presentation of the text. Particularly where the key reference is concerned, had he compared mine with the ANF which he uses, he would have seen that the differences with the latter are very minor and in no way change the sense of the ANF.)

Note that the opening two sentences here refer back to the other charges he has just addressed. The transition to the accusation of the criminal and his cross is almost seamless, with neither word nor tone indicating that he is not simply going from one "indecentcy" to the next:

"These and similar indecencies we do not wish to hear; it is disgraceful having to defend ourselves from such charges. People who live a chaste and virtuous life are falsely charged by you with acts which we would not consider possible, except that we see you doing them yourselves. Moreover, when you attribute to our religion the worship of a criminal and his cross, you wander far from the truth in thinking that a criminal deserved, or that a mortal man could be able, to be believed in as God. Miserable indeed is that man whose whole hope is dependent on a mortal, for such hope ceases with his [the latter's] death."

And that's it. Could there be any greater example of a limp, throwaway, non-committal response to an accusation as important as this? Could a Christian apologist be any more obscure, any more misleading, in dealing with the central item of the faith? Is this a *defense* of the crucified Jesus? Those two sentences contain nothing but negative terminology. "Criminal" is repeated twice, reference to a "mortal man" twice; the believer who hopes on a mortal is "miserable." The mortal man dies and hope ceases. Could an orthodox Christian apologist have been happy with such a response? Would he have formulated it this way in the first place? Could he possibly believe that his pagan readership would understand the hidden qualifications, the supposed implications, which modern scholars manage to extract from it? How can Caecilius avoid absorbing nothing but negativity? How is he to take from this that the crucified man was *not* a criminal? How would he know that this man was instead innocent? That he was more than mortal? That hope *can* be placed on this man because it does not cease with his death, that the believer in Jesus is in no way "miserable"? None of this is even intimated. It is declared by modern apologists to be implied, but only because those things are part of their own belief system and they *want* them to be there.

Baylis remarks: "There can be nothing more regrettable than the way in which the answer is given to the charge of worshipping a crucified man... An instructed Christian might understand the allusion to the divinity of Christ, but it is certain that the Pagan would at once infer that his direct challenge had been avoided, since general observations about deification had been substituted for the admission or denial that the Christians worshipped Christ crucified." Even Baylis' "allusions" have been read into the text. Because of *a priori* certainty that this author, along with all the others, must be orthodox Christian (otherwise the whole house of cards would come tumbling down), scholarly studies are devoted to explaining how this could be so in the face of writings that reflect back at them only fog and distortion.

Unlike other apologists, the author of *Minucius Felix* has brought up the very subject that so many of them seem to avoid like the plague. If he has had the courage to present Jesus of Nazareth and his crucifixion in spite of all the alleged reasons not to, why would he then handle him in so wretched a fashion? If the human founder is brought on stage in full view, why is he not defended to the best of the writer's ability?

The scramblings of apologists like GDon thus become an exercise in futility. I talked earlier about the beam that is left in the eye while the splinter is taken out and whittled into some desired shape. GDon offers three different tinkering with the text.

First, in regard to the accusation passage (9), he quotes the Latin for the key sentence "And some say that the objects of their worship include a man who suffered death as a criminal, as well as the wretched wood of his cross; these are fitting altars for such depraved people, and they worship what they deserve." He points to the word "*facinoris*" as meaning "bad deed, crime, villainy," giving the phrase a meaning of, "that the man was punished for bad deeds or for villainy." No argument there. But he then accuses me of using (or inventing) the translation just stated which "de-emphasizes" this. Supposedly, my "who suffered death as a criminal," avoids presenting the idea that "Christians worshiped a common criminal who had committed actual crimes." He offers two other translations which make this distinction clearer: "a man punished by extreme suffering **For His Wickedness**," and "a **Malefactor** put to death **For His Crimes**." I find this to be hair-splitting to a bizarre degree. Let me offer in turn one of the translations I incorporated: "a man who was punished with death as a criminal..." (G. W. Clarke, *Ancient Christian Writers* #39, 1946), which puts things as I did. Apparently Clarke failed to realize he was misleading the reader.

On the basis of his preferred translation, GDon declares that the pagan accusation is that "Christians are wicked because their founder was wicked." While not impossible, particularly as an implication, it is certainly putting a twist on the actual words. But what good does this do? Does it really get apologists out of a jam? Hardly. It simply puts a slightly different requirement on the Christian Octavius to refute that meaning, which is something he does not do. He does not in any way declare that this crucified man did *not* commit any crime. In fact, in his response he simply refers to this man as "a criminal" (*noxium*) which implies that he accepts Caecilius' designation of him, and goes on to declare that it is ridiculous to think that we Christians would worship a criminal as a god. It seems to me that GDon's preferred translation gets him into even greater trouble than before; certainly it in no way improves the situation.

He, however, seems to think that with this meaning, Octavius' response is actually a refutation of the charge. "For in that you attribute to our religion **The Worship Of A Criminal And His Cross**, you wander far from the neighborhood of the truth, in thinking either that a criminal deserved, or that an earthly being was able, to be believed God." He then states: "Note that M. Felix is NOT denying that his religion worships a crucified man, as Doherty implies. How do pagans 'wander far from the truth'? It isn't by thinking that Christians worshiped a criminal and his cross, **But By Thinking That Anyone Would Worship Someone Who Was An Actual Criminal**. Rather than being a denial that Christians worshiped a crucified man, it appears to be an affirmation that the person being worshiped was crucified."

Now, if anyone can get their mind around this piece of tortuous logic, I commend them. If GDon's interpretation of the accusation were true, Octavius' rejoinder would have to address this understanding of it, it would have to be phrased in such terms. It is not. Octavius does not deny that the crucified man was a criminal; in fact, as I said, he calls him that himself. GDon expects us, and *Felix's* readers, to see in the "wander far from the truth" the denial of GDon's preferred translations and understandings. In other words, that he is saying to Caecilius: "It is not the truth that this man was a criminal, it is not true that he actually committed a crime." This is simply wishful thinking. Even if the accusation *should* be phrased in such terms, Caecilius and the reader would be hard put, after an interval of 18 chapters, to understand exactly what Octavius is supposed to be refuting, and take it from the simple phrase "wander far from the truth." The phrase has to be understood in the immediate context in which it appears. It refers to the previous sentence, in which the accusation is stated as: you worship a criminal and his cross—just that. And it is repeated immediately afterward, as I pointed out, by Octavius continuing to refer to the crucified man as a criminal. GDon's dancing around the texts is so convoluted as to be comical. But they are typical of apologetic tactics. I will allow that not too many are quite so proficient at

this kind of exercise as GDon. The plain denial in Chapter 29 that Christians worship a crucified criminal has become an *affirmation* that the Christians worship a crucified man. Black is white.

GDon's next attempt to reinterpret the text in the image of his own preference deals with the passage that immediately follows. Octavius muses about the idea of worshiping a man, and points to the Egyptians who do so (which Baylis regards as meaning Anubis); he offers some thoughts about whether that man, or princes and kings in general, should be viewed and treated as a god. He thinks doing so is not "proper," rather they should simply be accorded honors and hailed as great and outstanding men. This "would be the most fitting tribute to a man of distinction, and affection the greatest comfort to a benefactor." This translation is from *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 10, and corresponds to the ANF that GDon uses, in which the final phrase reads: "whereas honour is more truly rendered to an illustrious man, and love is more pleasantly given to a very good man."

Whichever translation is used, the idea Octavius is conveying is that we ought not to worship men as gods at all; it is best simply to accord them honor and love. Its connection with the preceding rejection of the crucified man should be clear: Caecilius has accused the Christians of worshiping a crucified criminal; Octavius has responded that this is not so, that it would be foolish, since no criminal deserves to be so worshiped, and no mortal is *able* to be so worshiped. These further thoughts about treating men as gods is simply stating a further dimension to the question. We ought not to treat men as gods at all; it's not fitting and it's better just to give them honor and love.

How GDon can turn this inside out and claim that this passage "appears to be the very defense of 'the crucified criminal' that Doherty says is lacking" is beyond me. Once again, black is white. In fact, the passage conveys the very opposite. If Octavius says that men should not be treated as gods, how can he be defending the Christian *worship* of a man, whether he was guilty of a crime or not? GDon has simply latched on to the idea of giving love to a good man (who is not a god), and declared that this is somehow meant as a defense against the accusation of worshiping a bad man (who *is* a god). This would be so obscure—and illegitimate, since one is held to be human, the other divine—as to be unintelligible. GDon has completely failed to understand and apply Octavius' later remarks.

This is followed by a curious statement:

"...the primary question in a thesis regarding the question of Christ's historicity should be: what is M. Felix saying about his beliefs? Given the late date that this was written, his comments as read can only apply to Christ. Again, Doherty doesn't ask: if M. Felix has another version of Christianity, then why doesn't he clearly give that version?"

Much of this is simply question begging. Claiming that a late date is a "given" not only contradicts what he said earlier about Tertullian admiring *Minucius Felix* so much his own *Apology* was inspired by it, I have pointed out that there are good arguments (see H. J. Baylis's study) for dating MF around 155. Even were it assigned a later date (or perhaps GDon is referring to the 155 date), the comments as read hardly have to be seen as only applying to an historical Christ. This is the very issue under debate, and given the obscurity of those comments and the general silence about so much relating to orthodox Christianity, GDon's claim has to be demonstrated, not assumed. As for his final remark, I don't see his point. My position is that the author *is* clearly giving his version of Christianity. It is represented by the sum total of what he says, which has nothing to do with a Jesus or Christ, let alone an historical one. And within that sum total is the clear rejection of Caecilius' accusation that the Christians worship a crucified man.

Now, let me clear up a common confusion. This is not to say that the author of *Minucius Felix* is directly denying the existence of an historical Jesus. Octavius' words do not say, "there never was such a man," or "the man you claim we worship never existed." He offers no opinion on that aspect of things. But this does not mean that we cannot draw such a conclusion ourselves. Think of it this way: if one group calling itself Christian is capable of denying that Christians do or ought to worship a crucified man, it can hardly be the case that the movement began in such a fashion. The author may or may not be aware of other circles who *do* hold to a crucified man as the founder and object of their faith. But if that man *had* existed and had been worshiped as God and savior throughout the movement, it would be impossible for any Christian writer not to know this and to deny outright, as Octavius does, the accusation he puts in Caecilius' mouth. Instead, he would surely be acknowledging Jesus' existence and attempting to discredit the traditions and claims about him, given that he obviously doesn't subscribe to them. This would require direct references in the text to the historical man himself. This in no way does the author do.

GDon makes a final attempt to recast the text. An added element of Caecilius' accusation is that the Christians worship the cross of the crucified man. I contend that Octavius' answer is tantamount to dismissing the cross entirely as a Christian icon. That seems pretty clear in his comment: "We do not adore them, nor do we wish for them." I also said that "he goes on to admonish the pagan for being guilty of using signs of crosses in their own worship and everyday life." I admit that this is not well stated, and needs to be better nuanced. What Octavius does is point out the common presence of the cross sign in general usage: that the pagans include and even adore representations of crosses as "parts of your gods" (is this an admission that some of the pagan gods, probably those of the mysteries, are associated with execution or even crucifixion motifs?), that they appear on flags and standards, that trophies and ships' sails imitate them, and even the common position of prayer creates a cross sign when "a man stretches out his hands to worship God with a pure heart."

This last comment, which GDon makes much of, is nothing special. It is not a defense of the sign of the cross, it is simply another example of the imitation of the cross shape in natural or man-made things. There is certainly no implication of any connection to the crucifixion. (Compare J. H. Charlesworth's unfounded contention that references in the Odes of Solomon to a "stretching out of the hands"—the arms held straight out to the sides—is a poetic metaphor for the cross.) What is Octavius' purpose here? Seeing the cross as being present in ordinary things (which is what he is saying) hardly serves as a useful or relevant argument in favor of its legitimate or special significance for Christians. It hardly serves as a *defense* for Christian use. His remarks follow on his "We neither worship nor wish for them," so they must serve to explain why not. The reason he gives is that they are natural and commonplace, even in pagan culture. Nothing he says indicates that he is defending them for Christians, either as signs or as material objects. As I say, "There is not a hint that for Minucius the cross bears any sacred significance or requires defending in a Christian context."

My phrase "admonish the pagan for using signs of the cross" is admittedly misleading. I should have said that Octavius admonishes the pagan for accusing the Christians of worshiping crosses, with its implication that crosses are despicable things; Octavius argues this is not so because they are actually commonplace things. GDon offers a distinction of his own and maintains that the pagan accusation about crosses is a charge that Christians worship the physical cross itself, rather than the *sign* of the cross. Octavius, he says, is defending the latter rather than the former; his comment, "crosses we neither worship nor wish for," is allegedly aimed solely in that direction. But Octavius' statements are hardly a *defense* of the cross as a sign; they are simply a demonstration of its commonplace character. Despite his mentioning that the sign of the cross

appears in prayer supplication, he is not imputing any special worthiness to it. This prayer position is not something specific to Christians. Thus, despite GDon's contention, there would be no conflict between the reference to the prayer position, and dismissing the cross as both a physical object of adoration and an icon. The passage as a whole indicates Octavius is denying that Christians value either.

Conclusion

Much of GDon's summary case against me involves the accusation that I have "badly misread" and misinterpreted the documents, and that I haven't examined all the literature of the period. I think those accusations have been sufficiently discredited. In his conclusion, he repeats the argument that if belief in an historical Jesus existed in some circles by early in the century, then by later in the century no pockets of continuing mythical Jesus belief could have existed without them coming to the attention of the early heresiologists, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, who would certainly have remarked on groups who had a Jesus that was still not regarded as having been on earth. But this objection is based on a significant misconception.

There is a very important distinction GDon and others are overlooking, and it is not the one between the historical and mythical Jesus (HJ and MJ). In fact, this dichotomy is here something of a misnomer. The forms of non-historical faith among the apologists we have been looking at in the latter half of the century should not, strictly speaking, be referred to as involving a mythical Jesus. Athenagoras & Co. are not "MJers" because they don't have any Jesus at all. The Logos itself is a mythical entity, but not in the same way. They don't have a sacrificial redeemer figure such as the one at the center of the Pauline cult, and this may to some extent be true even of *Diognetus*. No one among the apologists I have presented ever declared that they had a Jesus who was an entirely mythical figure. Rather, they had a Logos who was a revealing emanation of God; *Minucius Felix* didn't even have this. This means that GDon is demanding a reference by the later heresiologists to something that didn't exist. It may be that no pockets of mythical Jesus faith survived by the latter second century. They had evolved into historical Jesus faiths; or they had morphed into the gnostic sects who now placed a foot in both camps, turning their spiritual Christ into a docetic one and melding him with an adopted historical figure, largely under the influence of the Gospels. The philosopher-apologists of the second century belonged to a Logos religion, in which the Son was not a Jesus-Savior figure but only an abstract heavenly force, a part of God. As such, they would not have raised the ire of the heresiologists, for whom they may have blended into the general philosophical background. If they never brought up a Jesus or Christ (and remember that those apologists defined "Christian" in terms of anointing, not any Messiah, spiritual or human), why would the heresiologists have especially remarked on them?

GDon has misread the overall picture. If the documentary record of the first century and a half is examined without preconceptions, we find a remarkable diversity of theologies and soteriologies; of abstract, revealer, and sacrificial entities; varying blends of philosophy and religion, varying reliances on the Jewish scriptures and traditions. We find a disconnectedness, except in a few very general ways, between all these manifestations, which often coexisted at the same time. Beside them thrived Jewish non-mainstream sects with their own blends of faith and expectation, there were similar groups among the Greeks and Romans. Again I appeal to John Dillon's fortuitous phrase, "a seething mass of sects and salvation cults" [*The Middle Platonists*, p.396]. Communication was primitive, preservation and transmission of writings a fragile affair. There was no Internet to present the opportunity of viewing and understanding this riotous mix. Even today, do the Mormons worry about the Moonies, do evangelicals concern themselves with post-modernism?

When much of that great diversity coalesced into a common faith, much understanding of the

past was lost. The Gospels came to impose themselves over the whole conglomeration. If later commentators came to view an apologist like Athenagoras as a great writer and defender of their own faith, it was because they read that faith into what the apologists were saying and overlooked what they were not saying, just as the later Church misread Paul and saw in his Christ Jesus the human man they now believed in. Christianity still pursues that chimera today.

Within such a picture, many of the inconsistencies and contradictions within what we erroneously regard as a unitary movement with a single source and a linear development become understandable. GDon is making demands and drawing conclusions based on an entirely fanciful and distorted picture, one which the believing community within which he operates is incapable of letting go, of examining for flaws, of revising according to new or newly understood evidence. While his critique of my Second Century Apologists chapter/article comes from a reasonably scholarly direction, the closed-minded apologetic approach and the deficiencies of that traditional background guarantee that his case is irreparably off the mark.

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Addendum on the dating of Minucius Felix

Roger Pearse, in a posting on the IIDB thread regarding GakuseiDon's critique, made the following statement:

"Incidentally Doherty refers at some length to a phrase in Minucius Felix, but I understand that the recent HLL tells us that modern scholars consider the question of the priority of the *Apologeticum* solved, and that Minucius must therefore have been written between 210-245. This was published in 1997, two years before Doherty: but I understand from Michael Sage's monograph on Cyprian (extract) that this was resolved around 1975, on philological grounds. Once Minucius is understood to be a third century figure, contemporary with Tertullian and Cyprian, I think it becomes impossible to understand that isolated half-sentence in the manner Doherty would like."

But the priority of Tertullian's *Apology*—supposedly relegating *Minucius Felix* to the third century—is anything but "resolved." Investigating the link supplied by Pearse, one finds the following:

In the Introduction to Michael E. Hardwick's article:

"The current state of the question is that a later date is favoured, with the philological argument being solidly in that direction. However the question is really open...."

"The priority of Minucius Felix rests upon the coherence and style of his narrative while Tertullian's priority depends upon the assumption that his is the more vigorous and therefore more creative work. Both sides employ a priori considerations regarding what characterizes creativity. Therefore, the results are predetermined. Given the state of the debate it is not wise to go beyond dating the Octavius between c. 160 and c. 250 C.E."

When grounds such as coherence, vigor and creativity are used to "resolve" the priority between two works whose relationship has been debated for more than a century, we know that solid evidence is lacking. It is not surprising that the above editor finds these grounds not only highly subjective, but susceptible to *a priori* determination.

Hardwick offers quotes from reviews of various books relating to the question of MF's dating. The following are five out of the nine reviews offered, all of books published since 1985:

From a review of QUISPÉL (Gilles), *African Christianity before Minucius Felix and Tertullian* (1982):

...The final pages (308-321) reopen again the debate on the priority of the author of the *Octavius* which G.Q. has always held and which he still defends against all the philological arguments; because "Philology is a dead alley" (p.318).

From a review of CAPPELLETTI (Angel J.), *Minucio Felix y su Filosofía de la Religión* (1985):
...He adopts the date of 160 for the composition of the treatise, following W. Baehrens (1915), but without engaging in a real discussion on this so often debated question.

From a review of BROSCIUS (Mieczysław), *Quo tempore Minucii 'Octavius' conscriptus sit* (1994):

Argument founded on the historicity of the events related in the dialogue and on the existence of an edict of persecution. Minucius, Octavius and Caecilius must have been Roman citizens; they could not have embraced the Christian faith except before 202, year when Septimius Severus prohibited the conversion of Roman citizens to Christianity. If the facts reported are before 202, because of the premature death of Octavius, it is difficult to place the editing of the dialogue later than 212-220.

From a review of SIMONETTI and PRINZIVALLI, *Storia della letteratura cristiana antica* (1999):

... Minucius Felix (p. 162-165) appears before Tertullian (p. 166-179): even more precisely, *Oct* is dated a little before 197, the year in which *Apol* was published (p. 163), the argument advanced being that Tertullian readily reworks his own works or those of his predecessors.

From a review of ALDAMA (Anna Maria), *El Octavius de Minucius Felix* (1987):

On the subject of the relation between the *Octavius* and the *Apologeticum*, the author asks if the question of priority could one day be resolved, in the degree to which the two works reflect the very different situations of a Roman elite and a provincial milieu.

It would seem that the situation isn't quite as "resolved" as Pearse has suggested. He is relying on the opinion of Michael E. Sage, who, in an article included at the end of the above link, subscribes to the philological argument:

The problem has been decided in favour of the priority of the *Apologeticum*. The *Octavius* contains resemblances not only to the *Apologeticum*, but also to the earlier version of that work by Tertullian, the *Ad Nationes*. But careful analysis has revealed that the earlier work contains fewer resemblances to the *Octavius* than the finished version which became the *Apologeticum*. [p.53] But such an argument can cut both ways. It could be argued that the *Octavius* appealed more to Tertullian as he revised, resulting in its greater utilization in the *Apologeticum*. Further detailed analysis led to the false view that Minucius Felix was simply a compiler and that his dialogue was a mosaic.

Recently this view has been abandoned, and a decisive argument has been brought forward to establish the priority of the Apologeticum. [It is not clear from Sage's article exactly who was the source of this "decisive argument."] A careful analysis of the use made in the Octavius of Cicero and Seneca has revealed that the author adopted and changed them for his own purposes. The dialogue is more than a mere patchwork of classical commonplaces. A comparison reveals that the works of Tertullian are utilized in the same manner by Minucius Felix as the others. Thus the question of priority has been resolved in favour of Tertullian.

One wonders if the creators and supporters of this argument have taken into account the issues raised by the mythicist position, including many of the points I have presented in my book and in this article. While examining *Minucius Felix* as to its use of Cicero, Seneca and Tertullian, did they consider the questions mythicism raises: namely, why in his adaptation of Tertullian's *Apology* would the author of *Minucius Felix* cut out every reference to an historical Jesus; why would he introduce, with no qualification, all those denigrations of pagan religion which supposedly have clear parallels in the Christian religion; why would he abandon Tertullian's policy of having the pagan learn as much as possible about Christianity— including its founder? Why would his silence on an historical Jesus mirror several other documents of the second century and none of those of the third century he is purportedly a part of? And, of course, how above all could he treat the question of the crucified man in such a manner if he is the product of a post-Tertullian milieu? I suggest that these features of *Minucius Felix* offer an independent and far more reliable basis for resolving the question of priority. Orthodox scholars have turned a blind eye to such things, which calls into question the integrity of their comparisons between the two apologists. It also demonstrates how whole new windows are opened up for an understanding of many difficult and unresolved issues in early Christian scholarship when the mythicist theory is taken into account.